Mrs. Denys of Cote

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MRS. DENYS OF COTE.

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EDINBURGH AND LONDON

MRS. DENYS OF COTE.

BY

HOLME LEE,

AUTHOR OF "SYLVAN HOLT'S DAUGHTER," "STRAIGHTFORWARD," ETC.

"Have we not all, amid life's petty strife,
Some pure ideal of a noble life
That once seemed possible—and just within our reach?
We lost it. . . .
But still our place is kept, and it will wait
Ready for us to fill it, soon or late."

ADELAIDE PROCTOR.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE.
1880.

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BOOK THE THIRD.

COTE UNDER THE OLD ORDER

(Continued).

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MRS. DENYS OF COTE.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MINGLED YARN.

"A fame that is wounded to the world would be better cured by another's apology than his own; for few can apply medicines well to themselves."—BEN JONSON.

THE establishment of the Essex-Broughs at the Glen House was an epoch in Cote second only in importance to the marriage of the squire. They were rich people, but disarmed envy by their readiness to share with their neighbours the superfluity of the good things of this world that they possessed. Mrs. Moth, who had a large family of young people wanting to be amused, made haste, and led

the way in calling at the Glen House—casually remarking to an acquaintance whom she met on the road, that perhaps Mr. Essex-Brough was not a very nice person, and his wife was a dreadful flirt, but they would entertain, and she did not see that it mattered. Mrs. Moth's example was followed. Before long, everybody had called at the Glen House. There was no solid, assignable reason why they should not if they liked. Colonel and Lady Laura Hayman called, who had not paid Mr. and Mrs. Denys that compliment; and it was soon evident that the new-comers would give a new tone to the village society, but whether a better tone was yet to be learnt. Hitherto everybody had been friendly. None were so much above or below the rest as to be left outside the pale. Mrs. Moth was accustomed to call the society *mixed*, but Mrs. Wilton, who took precedence of

Mrs. Moth, had ruled that it would be nothing if not mixed; and Mrs. Denys had shown her practical agreement with Mrs. Wilton by bringing together all the pleasant people and clever people she could muster, without too much regard to their rank and fortune, or whether they lived in hired houses or in houses of their own.

Christmas is the season when the elements of society are fused, and the minor folk expected some good parties at the two great houses, in which reasonable expectation they were not disappointed. John and George Denys arrived at the Manor House in the third week of December, and their little sister arrived with them, escorted as before. Mrs. Denys met them at the gate, beautiful and beaming as if she had none but a happy mother's thoughts of children coming home. She would not give her heart time to ache

for others at a distance. If she had hoped for a sight of any of their faces, she knew now that the hope was foolish. She belonged to another family, and her place was by another hearth, amidst a very different company, who, except one or two, were strangers yet.

They had a riotous dinner the first evening, for Mrs. Essex-Brough was invited by special request of the boys, and little Marie-Irene claimed her seat next her father, and led the conversation with a shrill, incoherent volubility that incited the big brothers to peals of laughter.

Snow was a rare visitation at Cote, but the starlit, dark sky and clear, keen air were seasonable, and tempted nearly all of them out-of-doors afterwards. Delia would, indeed, have found herself alone by and by but for Marie-Irene, and even she had a longing

to go with the rest, which was not quelled without a bribe, and a promise of something sweeter to come.

Delia had been warned of a surprise preparing for her, and presently from the Dutch garden under her window rose all their voices, singing in unison an old German carol. And to this music she was treated every night they spent at home until Christmas was turned. It was delightful in its way, but with a strain of melancholy. It always set her dreaming of the last Christmas at the House with Golden Gables, which she had ceased to call *home*—a Christmas that had been spoilt with vexed oppositions and idle resentments. She knew that they would talk of her, but while she could realise a complete picture of them, it grieved her to think that they could not in their mind's eye see her, nor how she was surrounded—or solitary.

Yes, solitary. Though everybody was kind and loved her, everybody was busy, and had attractions away from her. Now she learned what the graceful accomplishments of life are worth, a thing that she had never quite realised or laid to heart before. Mrs. Essex-Brough knew so much, could do so much, was so animated, various, and gay with her singing and music, her painting and play-acting. She could dance so long, could ride so far and so fast, that the boys admired her exceedingly, and even thought a little scorn of their father's handsome young wife because she did not care for waltzing, and could resign Phœbus to them without a token of being sorry. That was Delia's goodness. Unless she had resigned Phœbus, both of them would not have had a mount at command, which would have much diminished their happiness. It made her glad to see

them enjoy themselves at liberty as only boys do, to see them ride off with their father for the supreme pleasure of a day's hunting, or go out sailing with the Todds and Jack Blythe to try their skill against the sea-birds that built by thousands in the ledges of the cliffs. To see them troop away to the Glen House carrying off little Marie-Irene was not so cheery, but she recollected what the Glen House was to them, and that the songs she heard at night must be practised.

"I wish I could take a part with you—I wish I were more amusing," she said to her husband once when they were leaving her soon after breakfast.

He did not seem to hear — little Marie-Irene was creating a great bustle—and she could not help feeling that he was a trifle negligent just then. The demand for strength

had come again in an unexpected form. Not to be fanciful, not to be exacting, was her present act of discipline.

"They are his children; they will not be with him so very long. It is small and selfish to grudge them to one another," she said to herself.

She watched them go from the window over the door, and waved her hand to George caracoling on Phœbus. Mr. Denys looked back, and was not without his reflections.

Then a message was brought from the Glen House to let her know that the young people would not return until the afternoon. "If they do not return, neither will he," she thought, and when the luncheon-hour was past and he had not come, she went out into the village alone to find something for herself to do.

Delia carried no heartache out of doors with her. She was too strong and too buoyant to repine long under any pressure less than pain, or positive calamity. For a little while the idea of Danesmore as a house shut up had weighed upon her, but it served as a lesson to multiply her resources, which she was putting now into daily practice.

Nothing was further from Mr. Denys' thoughts than to be negligent of his young wife, but he loved a change of company and conversation, and the proximity of Mr. and Mrs. Essex-Brough at the Glen House was sure to lead him to the resumption of many old ways and habits. He was profoundly impressed by some beautiful traits in Delia's character, but not perfectly sympathising with them, he had fallen into a misconception of her motives, and behaved

as if, like saints and other very good people, she chose sacrifice because it was sweet to her. Even so, he might sometimes have judiciously interfered with her enjoyment of sacrifice: Delia would have acquiesced in his overruling. But just now there were several near who diverted his thoughts, who preferred pleasure to denial, and absorbed their share of all that was going, and much of her share too.

"Mrs. Denys will have nothing to do with our cruel sports and idle pastimes. She is given up to good works. We are bound to take pity on our old friend, Hugh Denys," was Mrs. Essex-Brough's view and version of their frequent arrangements.

Mrs. Moth remarked that Mrs. Essex-Brough had a nice way of putting it—too nice for her belief.

There was no miserable penury at Cote—

it was beyond the stress and competition of the world—but there was abounding ignorance and small desire of useful knowledge. As the squire's lady Mrs. Denys felt that it was her vocation to introduce it, and with a general permission from the squire, she had set to work with salutary vigour, and was trampling on some venerable customs in the performance of her self-imposed task. She loved to rule, and her law was likely to be the law of kindness, but she was young, and a new-comer to the place, and her active virtues were imperfectly appreciated yet by the supine authorities to whom they were a rebuke. Old Crump, the agent, was in two minds whether to like her or not. Crump was familiarly called *old* not because of his age but his decrepitude. He was crippled with rheumatism, and hobbled always in pain, helping himself with two sticks. His

clothing was that of a thrifty mendicant to whom a charitable stranger might have offered sixpence. He prowled about, always looking on the ground, and muttering to himself. When he lifted his head he showed a surly, sagacious visage, shorn, perhaps, once a week; thick, grizzled brows depressed above a pair of keen, suspicious eyes; a forehead massive as a wall; great pendulous lips, and lank fringes of grey hair. There was power in his face and a humorous craft which Mrs. Denys shrank from. She had been amazed to find the management of Cote committed to such hands, but when she ventured to suggest that he should be pensioned and superseded by a more suitable person, Mr. Denys answered that he knew none more suitable,—Crump was still up to his duties, and forty years of devoted service constituted a claim that he was bound to respect.

Mr. Denys had inherited Crump's services with the estate. His former master had taken him into his employ as a cheap servant whose necessities would make him compliant. The last of the old Denyses had been strong for evil in the conviction that he could never be as poor men are—bound to labour for his bread and for little lapses from integrity liable to the rigour of the law; and long before Mr. Denys succeeded to his kingdom the process of moral disintegration that a servant suffers under a greedy, mean, and wasteful master was accomplished in Crump. The agent transferred to the incoming squire that sort of devotion to his interests that had been exacted by the squire departed, and Mr. Denys, perplexed and cumbered with other matters, let him do unquestioned and uncontradicted.

Crump was quick to feel that Mrs. Denys did not like him, but he took her measure fairly, and did her almost justice, recognising in her the courage that it would have been unsafe to ignore. He had the credit of a rare tormentor amongst the feeble folk, but he was much too prudent to try a fall with his master's young wife by indulging in merely vexatious hindrances. What he loved was the solid fruits of power.

Mrs. Denys had acquiesced in her husband's dictum without a word. Though she felt for Crump that repulsion which some higher natures have for the lower, she gave him as the man in office his due of civility, which he repaid with elaborate deference. Soon the lady learned that she could no more afford to despise the old agent than he could afford to defy her. Each tacitly acknowledged in the other that force of character

which makes itself everywhere to be respected or feared. Crump was the skilled tool of good work as well as bad, and Mrs. Denys could not long resist the conclusion that he did on the whole such work as he found to be acceptable service. There was a smarting humiliation in this which had goaded her to tears before to-day. But it was what she had to bear—this learning, for a surety, that her husband had made power and not right his measure of justice often; and this afternoon she heard by accident one of those corrosive sentences of condemnation that bite into the memory never to be effaced.

"No man could serve Mr. Denys of Cote twelve months, and not get a bad name, sir."

The voice was Crump's voice, in rejoinder to some rebuke or taunt of Mr. Clarges.

Mrs. Denys turned out of their way confounded. They saw her, both of them, at the same instant, and separated with as much precipitation as the lady had escaped.

Mrs. Denys went directly home again, and shut herself in her boudoir adjoining the room where Phœbe sewed, and was singing then to herself while the house was deserted. None of them had returned who had gone out together in the morning, and the early winter twilight was creeping on—the time and atmosphere for sad cogitation. Delia wondered why a servant, loyal according to his lights, should emit so bitter a cry against his master. She remembered certain words of the judge that had stung her cruelly when they were spoken, though she did not believe them. She believed them now with a tingling of shame and pity. The recollection carried

her back to the House with Golden Gables. She saw Cricket crouching over his book in the bay-window, and glancing up, now and then, with a wise sentence for anybody who had ears to hear. She heard the continuous click of her grandmother's knitting-needles in the dusk, and the swift sound of her mother's pen running on by the glow-worm light of a little lamp in the trivial daily record for her husband which dear love made momentous. Phœbe's monotonous sweet chant mingled with her musings, which wavered to and fro with sorry regrets. Suddenly the servant came in to light the room, not knowing she was there, and surprised her with the cloud of tears in her eyes.

"Dear mistress, what ails you that you fret?" Phœbe said, standing before her—a square, lean figure, a homely face of the

true peasant type. Mrs. Denys could have no effectual concealments from her sagacious little maid.

"Nothing, Phœbe. I think the world tires me sometimes—that is all."

"There's no cure for that complaint, unless it be bending one's mind more to one's duty —and loving more."

"And loving more? You should be a preacher of the Methodists, Phœbe. I wish I had your heart. You are humble and thankful. You toil through your round of reiterated duties as holy service."

"My duties are sweet and easy—I desire no better than I have. There are blessings we don't stop to count when we have had them always—food and fire, a roof over our heads, and a warm bed to lie on. To go amongst the poor, and see what it is to be without them, to see trouble that hurts worse

than ours, is a sermon that don't slip soon out of mind."

"Have you seen such trouble, Phœbe? Mr. Clarges says that there are no very poor people here."

"There are no very *bad* poor people here, but there are some very poor. It is the clergyman's way to bid labourers be content with their wages, and to help them a bit when they fall sick. Help can never come amiss in time of sickness even if wages be fair, but wages are not fair hereabouts, and some of the homes are dreadful. The parish doctor could tell. He's been the poor's best friend."

Phœbe's tone was become the tone of an uncompromising advocate. Mrs. Denys was not thoroughly acquainted with the village yet. She had seen what looked like idleness and thriftlessness there, and was still

disposed to lean back on Mr. Clarges' report. But Phœbe having begun to say, said on, and assured her mistress that would not do. Mr. Clarges was a kind and pleasant gentleman, but one of the old "yea-lord" parsons who found it easier to give his half-crown and preach patient forbearance to the poor than to exhort the rich against covetousness and extortion. Mrs. Denys did not arrest Phœbe's freedom of speech, but asked, when she made an end, how she came to be so prejudiced.

"I belong to the Blythes at the Orchard," Phœbe said, speaking as if that was answer and explanation enough.

Mrs. Denys recollected her husband's note on the Blythes—"A good stock, but puritanical—a perpetual reproach to their squires," and looked at her sturdy little maid with a new discernment. Phœbe's face was ex-

pressive of nothing but sense and the simplicity of goodness. At another moment her mistress might have recommended her to order herself more lowly and reverently to her betters, but she understood now that such advice was best omitted. Phœbe was of a robust character. She went to church, a born Dissenter without knowing it, her opinion of parsons an opinion by ancient inheritance. Mrs. Denys inquired for some particular instance of the suffering through poverty that Phœbe had made allusion to, and Phœbe mentioned a family that had come to Cote since Michaelmas, to work on the Manor Farm, a family of six.

"And poverty is not the worst of their misfortunes. They have been hardly used. The man was committed to Beauminster 'sizes last summer for what he'd never done. He lost his harvest, and was put out of

prison at the beginning of winter. They came here beggared; for nothing was given him—not so much as to pay his way home to where he'd worked before, nor any warrant that he'd been falsely charged."

"But that seems very unjust. I think you must be misinformed, Phœbe. I will ask Mr. Denys to look into it."

"The master is not a magistrate," Phœbe said laconically. "The man's a tenant of his —Mr. Crump takes the rent."

Mrs. Denys was about to speak again when there was a sound, a mellow whistle from below. It was her husband returned alone, but the rest were not likely to be far behind. Delia, the cloud in her eyes gone, ran downstairs to receive him.

Mr. Denys came forward and kissed her. She said: "How the boys at home would laugh to see me answer to a whistle! Mistress

Pride coming at call like any other humble, affectionate creature!"

"So she ought, an' she love me," said her husband, and laughed with an intent look in her eyes.

Delia blushed, conscious that they might show tears, and hung on his arm. There was no acting in this. When he was there it came to pass somehow that her mind let go the thoughts that had vexed her in his absence. He did not like tears, and she knew that, and would have hidden them. He began to ask where she had been, and what she had done since the morning. She told him a part, but not the whole, and that she did not tell him all he guessed from the shy, abrupt avoidance of her manner, and her haste to quit the subject. She began to ask where he had been. He told her that George and he had been to a

meet of the harriers at Marshleas, and had ridden nearly as far as Danesmore.

As Mr. Denys talked he drew his wife into his private room where he saw people on business, and asked again how she had amused herself since the morning. He did not suspect her of falling into mischief, but her manner provoked a suspicion of some sort, and he had probably compunctious visitings for having left her all the long day alone. Now Delia had argued the case with herself, and had decided that it was wiser if possible never to let her husband know when any old matter to his disadvantage was brought before her. If she had been practised in evasions she might have succeeded, but this time she failed signally. Her face burned, and the tears, not chased far from her eyes, re-filled them. Mr. Denys' countenance was overcast. Happily

for them both, Delia was not a coward; and when she saw that there was no chance of deceiving him for good, she took her course with courage enough though falteringly, not being sure of his humour, which was new to her.

"Hugh dear, don't be angry if I am sorry because of some things that you did before we were married. I seek nothing out, only I see and hear. Let us be friends—we shall do better together."

"What sort of things?" said Mr. Denys, and his countenance cleared. "Not capital offences since they are so easily condoned."

Delia was dumb for a minute. It struck her that her husband did not know—absolutely did not know—on what a low level of esteem he stood amongst his neighbours and dependants, or perhaps he knew more than he cared. But this thought would

not bear dwelling on in his presence. She recurred to the theme of the day's sport. She was always eager for news when Mr. Denys had been where men congregated for business or pleasure; she was always hoping something, she hardly knew what, but something that would give greater brightness and elevation to the scenery of their daily life. He read her customary expectation in her looks, and would fain have gratified it, but he had nothing to tell that was likely to gratify her; and the noisy advent of John with little Marie-Irene released them from a difficult moment.

CHAPTER XIX.

TWO OR THREE NEIGHBOURS.

"Men's thoughts are much according to their inclination; their discourse and speeches according to their learning and infused opinions; but their deeds are after as they have been accustomed."—BACON.

THERE was company at the Manor House that evening, and Mr. Clarges was one of the guests. No more genial guest ever sat at table, nor guest better bred. He let go on principle the things that were too hard for him, and continued softly on his undisturbed way. He had been at Cote nearly as long as the squire himself. His presentation to the living was Mr. Denys' first act of independent power. He had heard him preach, and had liked what he said; and

they had been on terms all through the difficult middle period of Mr. Denys' life. The clergyman had the habits of a quiet country gentleman, with a broad streak of the heathen philosopher and some blending of the theological virtues. He was not a profound scholar nor a learned divine. To compose a sermon was ever an effort with him, but he did not shirk the task, and his parishioners listening to him on Sunday in the pulpit, heard precepts that squared very fairly with what little they knew of him in their work-a-day life.

Formerly, when Mr. Clarges was challenged to render a reason for his more than tolerance of his patron, he would move about with slow, deliberative step, and answer that he had, perhaps, no choice—no choice: Mr. Denys had a repentant mind, and was freely disposed to repair the wrong he had

done, but the poor lady, who was a Catholic and not English, declared her conscience easy, and refused to be other then she was. Their children were brought up in her religion, and given to know that they could not inherit their father's possessions. Mr. Denys loved his children, no man more—let those who judged him be satisfied that he was not going unpunished.

Not many critics of the rector's conduct troubled him a second time. The case was exceptional, and it was well seen that the offenders paid to the uttermost farthing the social fine they had incurred by their transgression of conventional law.

The squire and the parson were friends still, and likely to be better friends since the squire had brought home a legally married wife of a good county family; for Mr. Clarges was of the county himself, and

had a pretty property at Bourtree, which made him independent of his benefice, and gave him a standing amongst the small landed gentry. Mrs. Denys had taken to him with implicit confidence. Like the majority of men and clergymen, he probably found it easier to deliver a heavy sentence against wrong-doing in the abstract than to tell his neighbour face to face that he was doing wrong. But he had so much left of the public-school-boy tone, that, Phœbe Blythe's opinion notwithstanding, Mrs. Denys believed and was sure that he would have courage and spirit to speak up for fair-play if ever he saw a friend under temptation to give fair-play the go-by. She could have no comfort in him as her clergyman else.

Crump's hard words had not ceased to ring in Mrs. Denys' ears, and there was a momentary self-consciousness in her air

when Mr. Clarges was announced, but his manner was simply cordial, and showed no trace of painful recollection. Just before he appeared, Delia had been telling her husband of those poor people whom Phœbe had mentioned, and inviting his interference to obtain some redress for them. Mr. Denys did not see what he could do. The case was referred to the clergyman, who was cognisant of it, but did not see what he could do any more than the squire in getting justice for the man. Both the gentlemen seemed to acquiesce in his misfortune as final, but Mr. Denys perceived from the surprised, indignant lifting up of his wife's head that her next words would be in scorn of their helplessness, and he made haste to mollify her.

"Send the judge a letter—tell him there is a flaw somewhere in his fine legal

system. You may bid Crump remit the rent for this year, and let Mrs. Brice see whether they have beds to lie on."

Mr. Clarges had taken care of that, and had given them fuel. "They have had help, but help to be of permanent service needs to be more thorough where the destitution is so complete. Three of the children are very young, and they have no milk. I wish one of our beneficent ladies would set up a parish cow. That enterprise might befit my good sister Nancy—I must propose it to her." Mr. Clarges was pleased and amused by his spontaneous suggestion, and proceeded to view it all round.

Mrs. Denys was eager to put it in practice: "Will you give me a cow, Hugh?" she said on the instant.

"To be a nursing-mother to the weanlings? Yes, I will give you a cow, two if

you like, the best that can be bought with money."

Mr. and Mrs. Essex-Brough were announced. The lady had caught the tail of Mr. Denys' sentence, and wanted to know the object of his bounty. It was explained to her. "You are going in for charity, and the amelioration of the clods," she said in a voice and with an accent that made it quite superfluous to add that charity and the amelioration of the clods were not in her line.

"Don't believe her, Mr. Clarges. We know that she has a heart," Delia cried out, intercepting the clergyman's cold glance of disapproval at his new parishioner, whom he met now for the first time. Later they became friends.

Mrs. Essex-Brough stared. Her husband looked down with a short laugh of disagree-

able meaning. The lady reddened, and as the door opened again to admit George and John she turned to talk to them, and perhaps to cover a degree of confusion that was most unusual in her.

The arrival of Sir Thomas Britton from Marshleas, accompanied by his eldest daughter as her mother's representative, and of Mr. and Mrs. Midas from Cambourne, made the party complete, and they went to dinner.

Mr. Denys cared for no company but his intimates. Delia loved to exercise hospitality for the show and pleasure of it, but she had begun to feel rather oppressively that there was a sameness in the society that gathered at their table, and, putting aside the rector, who was a standing dish, that the best of it was not up to the intellectual level of the society she had been used to at Auldcaster. Sir Thomas Britton was a lean and hungry

fox-hunter, who contributed nothing besides his presence to a feast; and though his womenkind were good and comely, they were not gifted with tongues. Mr. Midas was a stout, dark, middle-aged man, short-sighted, pompous, and vague, except at rare moments when his visage was lighted by side-long glances of bird-like cunning.

He was lately married to a very young lady, very pretty, lively and fine, whose pardonable weakness it was to make a god of him—concerning which weakness Mrs. Essex-Brough, his cousin, remarked what a goose she must be. She was another of those poor young ladies who had had what Mr. Denys called the great luck of marrying a man of property, and no doubt she was grateful.

"We hate each other, but we are immense friends," Mrs. Midas on her part confided to Mrs. Denys, alluding to her husband's con-

nections at the Glen House; but the confidence did not engage Mrs. Denys to ratify a friendship with the squire's wife from Cambourne.

Sir Thomas Britton was an honest sort of gentleman, and Delia liked him as well as any of Mr. Denys' long associates in the neighbourhood. The old fox-hunter had lately startled a large company with the round assertion that Mr. Denys had *no vices*, and a pluckier fellow never crossed a horse. Sir Thomas had a right to his opinion: he had known Mr. Denys in the hunting-field and in his own house for a score of years; and Lady Britton was one of the few mothers of county families who had not consigned him to perdition for keeping faith with a woman who was at his mercy. There were people who rumoured that Lady Britton had daughters of an age to marry—the same people who

rumoured at the same date that Miss Charlotte Deane Foxe had a heart to give away, and Mr. Denys was a bachelor. Mrs. Wilton had leisure to cultivate a knowledge of secret history, and was rather prone to diffuse it. She found Mrs. Denys genuine, and would have given her a quiet intimation, here and there, of facts that she did not suspect; but at her first attempt Delia covered her ears, crying out that if she must live in a world of meanness she would rather not know it. In truth, Delia missed daily, and more and more, the sweet and wholesome faces of Grace and Emmeline, her cousins, but she was not disposed to fill the vacuum with faces less agreeable.

CHAPTER XX.

VILLAGE POLITICS.

"To mortal men great loads allotted be;
But of all packs no pack like poverty."

HERRICK.

THESE incidents and others too trivial to enumerate, yet which collectively were a great force, directed Mrs. Denys' mind—never to be at rest again without worthy occupation—to the systematic study of her duties as the squire's wife of Cote. That terrible verdict which Crump had pronounced against her husband lost none of its severity with thinking on. Of course she did not quite believe it, and also, of course, she was careful not to betray to the agent any sign that she had

heard it. Crump was afraid with a craven fear until Mrs. Denys had once spoken to him after, and experiencing on that occasion no chill of fresh resentment in her behaviour, he took heart, and began trying to lay a foundation in her confidence.

His first opportunity was by avowing his kindness for judicious planting, and doing a bit on her suggestion, that a certain straight, shadeless lane running east and west might be made beautiful and delightful in summer if it were planted as an avenue of lime-trees. The lime-trees were set in the hedgerows in the course of that season, and not one of them failed. The agent knew well what he was about in woodland matters, and was not above being gratified by Mrs. Denys' approval. In a little while they were seen walking up the village together, by appointment evidently, for Crump wore his Sunday clothes. After another little

while he wore those Sunday clothes every day, and got a new suit for church-going purposes. Some of his neighbours remarked that he was turning over a new leaf; other some rather invidiously hoped that he would not have the lady's ear as he had the squire's.

One morning Mrs. Denys fell in with the agent near the inn, and invited him to take a turn with her across a grass field, a shorter way to the rectory, where she had an errand, than by the road. It was a swampy field where flocks of geese were clamorous, but besides the geese to which its moistness was a joy for ever, several families of native folk lived there in the perpetual fog of unwholesome houses. These houses were all under thatch, and their roofs sunken, rotten, and broken. They were not all equally lost in dirt, but whatever depended on their pro-

prietor was equally neglected. The reek of decay was everywhere, and the aspect of misery reigned supreme. A lean and ragged woman was hanging out other rags to sweeten, and a lame girl was driving a troop of children from their play in the mire. Around these houses there was always mire, and after rain the foot sank deep in the spongy soil. Very old the houses were, nor yet likely to fall down of themselves. The walls were of stone, thick and solid, and some black inside with the grime of ages. On the rafters the smoke hung in palpable webs, and about the floors every creature that creeps and crawls and runs in stagnant filth throve and was merry, from the lively rat to the abounding woodlouse which made a moving darkness in the damp, noisome corners.

The rector knew these interiors well. There he hummed much of patience and

resignation to the will of God, of suffering here and bright reward hereafter; and perhaps some of the poor souls who heard what he had to say gropingly believed that there might be something in it. But neither he nor they made any push to alleviate the present horrors of their earthly habitation. It seemed in the nature of things that they should be poor, passive, and servile. They bobbed and curtseyed to the squire and the parson, and in the dull submission of ignorance took no thought of any wrong inflicted, or right withheld. The parson's desire was that everybody should be good, contented, and happy. The way he pointed was plain. They must beware of the sin of rebellion, and not meddle with those who were given to change. He preached of the open Bible as the flag of the Reformation and the bulwark of liberty, and wished he could see it in the

hand of every man, woman, and child in the kingdom. It was a curious paradox—but he did not consider, or did not remember, how many things are written in that Book dangerous to be known as maxims by rough and unlearned persons, oppressed in their wages, brutalised by indiscriminate housing, and pierced by the sharp thorn of hunger.

Crump also was familiar with these interiors. He had a very bad name there, not for meddling but for letting meddling alone. One of the occupants, a widow woman and a hard striver for decency, had spoken to Mrs. Denys, who now spoke to Crump.

"Cannot this be remedied?" she said with a gesture comprehending the whole state of things.

"The houses are not ours, madam," the agent said, but he seemed uncomfortable under the question.

"The houses are not ours to take and clear off the face of the earth, which would be the right thing to do, but there are conditions in the owner's ground-lease binding him to keep them in fit repair. Why are not these conditions enforced?"

Crump did not say why. He was unused to be called to account as a slack hand, but, in fact, he was a respecter of persons, and never cared to vex the Philistines—the local vestrymen and guardians of the poor, who put money in their purses by saving on the property that they abused as a very bad investment, but stuck to as if it were well worth keeping.

"I'll see what can be done," he muttered, and hobbled on, chaffering with his lips as his manner was when discomfited.

Mrs. Denys accommodated her steps to his painful pace, and mentioned some other

matter which bore pleasanter mention, and at the rectory-gate, where the rector was at the moment entering, she bade him good-day. Crump passed both sticks into one hand that he might take off his hat to the lady, and having paid her this formal tribute of respect, he vouchsafed to the clergyman a surly recognition, and trudged laboriously away.

The rectory was a pretty rustic place, thatched like its humbler neighbours, and its deep-set windows composed of little leaded panes like theirs. The garden was very nice in the old-fashioned taste, mingled of fruit-trees and flowers, sunny and productive, and the lawns of a vivid greenness. One long turfed walk, with espaliers and an inner border of gay and fragrant plants on either side, was its distinctive feature and principal charm, next to its orderliness and

neatness. Myrtles overgrew the front of the house, and the upper casements peeped out of the bushes like dim, glazed eyes.

The rector was unmarried, and had a sister for his housekeeper several years older than himself. Miss Nancy was coming up the garden with some winter pears in her apron as Mrs. Denys appeared, and met her with a gurgle of apology and welcome. Mr. Clarges let the rivulet of prattle flow on—the shortest way with his garrulous good sister, who abhorred a vacuum of silence—till catching his deprecating eye, her manner was abruptly hushed. "I was only just telling you that I have been gathering the few last pears of the sort you like, Henry. Mrs. Denys may like one too. Will you come in? Luncheon is ready."

This was no poor parsonage where thrift toils unceasingly in the wake of debt, but

the abode of a spiritual pastor with comfortable private means, and the taste to enjoy good fortune. Mrs. Denys resorted there for instruction in matters parochial, and Mr. Clarges was glad of her vigorous and helpful assistance. If Miss Nancy, clerical lady paramount for a score of years, manifested some jealousy of her interference, that was because she so dearly loved to rule, and believed none else so fit.

They sat down to table. Mrs. Denys would eat only a crust of brown bread and butter, and one of Miss Nancy's beautiful pears, but she had plenty to say, and on a variety of subjects. She spoke of the coal-club and clothing-club, of the fund for booting and shoeing the children of widows, and paying their school pence—institutions that owed their struggle into existence, and survival through many difficulties, to the warm heart,

open hand, and untiring energy of Miss Nancy. But her special errand concerned the schools, supported by voluntary contributions often in arrear. She wished to have them, as she called it, more thoroughly in hand, and to have the subscribers kept up to the mark. The clergyman listened to her views with attention and respect. He also would have liked the subscribers to be kept up to the mark, but he had never been able to see his way to it. It was easier to pay the deficit out of his own pocket than to invite his neighbours with whom he dined to pay what they owed.

Mrs. Denys' next suggestion was a tampering with what had been hitherto Miss Nancy's pet prerogative. She wished that the Christmas prizes should for the future be given in money. "I think it may be a means of teaching the children the true

value and right use of money," she explained with cheerful common sense.

Miss Nancy shook her head negatively and disapprovingly. "We don't want to make little misers of them — we want to train them for heaven," she said, and there was the emphasis of pious rebuke in her voice.

The notion was, in fact, without precedent. Mr. Clarges himself demurred. Little good books were the rule, and dolls for the children of tender age. Mrs. Denys blushed—she had not prepared herself for any denial of privileges. The moment was critical. Miss Nancy's watchful observation was on the younger lady's tell-tale cheek. The clergyman did not like to see her disconcerted, and intervened as a moderator.

"With mutual goodwill and forbearance we shall work harmoniously together. Nancy,

you must continue to give your prizes as you have done before—the little ones would be disappointed else. But Mrs. Denys' generous proposal cannot be rejected without consideration. It is possible that the first class of boys and the first class of girls might profit by it."

Mrs. Denys recovered her countenance, and without abating a jot of her lawful pretensions, deferred to what the rector said. Miss Nancy was on her part profoundly agitated by the prospect of a competitor for power whose claims could not be disallowed, but she knew when her brother's tone was meant to recommend her to silence, and she said nothing until the visitor had taken her leave. Then pride surged uppermost, and she opened upon him with characteristic fluency and angry unreason.

Was her hard work at the schools for all these years to be set aside? Was she

to be put out of her place by a young lady without experience, who, as soon as the novelty was worn off, would abandon the children to anybody who cared to take the trouble? But she would not resume it—certainly not. If there was to be a divided authority she would retire from the management of the schools once for all—once for all.

Was her dear Henry supposing that Mrs. Denys might be depended upon for regular attendance? That was ridiculous! Mrs. Denys would be away in London three months of the year—probably she would be going abroad; and even if she were constantly at home, how could she, a stranger and newcomer to Cote, be a substitute for herself, who had known every child from its birth, was godmother to half-a-dozen of them, and deeply, vitally interested in the welfare of them all?

"My good Nancy, *peace*," pleaded her brother at the first pause she made for breath. At the second he muttered: "The management of the schools is not vested in *you*;" and while the poor lady was quivering under this home thrust, he effected his escape.

In his study Mr. Clarges sat down and covered his eyes, a trick of his when perplexed and worried. That good Nancy fatigued him sometimes. She would have fatigued most men. As a lay-curate she was invaluable, but the rector felt as if he could bear her yoke no longer. The study was his refuge. It was not a luxurious place, but it was quiet and sacred to its owner—a room with odd nooks and corners, angles and recesses, and an open stone chimney. Faintly tinted sketches of scenes dear to the clergyman's memory adorned the walls, and deal shelves were fitted in here and there to hold

his books, a miscellaneous collection and very shabby.

Mr. Clarges was over fifty now—growing old in the world, but always mild and genial, and by ladies still highly appreciated. If he had not been taken such excellent—*too* excellent—care of by Miss Nancy, he might have fallen to the lot of a wife before this. At his first coming to Cote there had, indeed, been a rumour, but it had died away, and the opinion of the parish since was that Miss Nancy would not allow him to marry. She called herself a blessing to dear Henry. Other people called her a blessing disguised. Of late years she had become such a blessing as Providence makes use of for the discipline of over-easy and indolent persons. They desire but to be quiet, and some Miss Nancy is given them for a blister, to keep up a salutary irritation, and preserve them from

moral lethargy. Poor human nature does not like it, and the most long-suffering of men have been known to rid themselves of their thrall by an outbreak of desperate wilfulness and self-assertion. This temper and terror of the smart had been for a considerable while past seething in the clergyman's breast, and Miss Nancy, though she did not know it, was, every time she wearied or contradicted him, treading on volcanic ground.

The eldest Miss Britton was past her bloom, but she had still many charms, mild persuasive charms, not the least of them being a faithful preference for Mr. Clarges' conversation before that of younger men. She was an excellent listener, and could stay for her turn to speak—now Miss Nancy never listened, and was always impetuous to put in her word.

The rector mused of Miss Britton as he

sat in his study, shading his eyes from the common day. And when he had done musing he ordered his quiet cob, and rode out to Marshleas to make a call on his old friend Sir Thomas Britton. When he rode back again the term of his bachelorhood and of Miss Nancy's autocracy at Cote was fixed.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONFLICTING INFLUENCES.

"Whatever man possesses, God hath lent,
And to His audit liable is ever,
To reckon how and where and when he spent."

FLETCHER.

THE rector's wooing had not been long a-doing, and his neighbours were unfeignedly glad to be able to congratulate him. Miss Britton was liked, but Cote did not want to part with Miss Nancy. It was a heavy blow and great discouragement to the poor people when she was talked of as likely to go away, but by Mrs. Denys' tact she was saved to the place after she had called her dear Henry

a deceitful man, and had gone crying to the Manor House to tell the squire's wife, so lately her most dreaded rival, that she was half in a mind to carry her useful properties of working and giving into another parish.

Also Mrs. Blythe at the Orchard had told her that she would be missed—there was nobody the old folks would miss so much.

"Yes, they would feel a loss, I know they would feel a loss—and why should they lose, poor things? The fault is none of theirs," Miss Nancy ingenuously reflected.

"We must try and prevail on you to stop," said her humble friend.

On her way home Miss Nancy met Old Crump in the road, and the sight of him suggested an accommodation. She asked him if he knew of a cottage to let. Crump mentioned a little shop with a parlour over in the village street, a very modest lodging,

but rustic and pretty. The lady was familiar with it.

"That will do, that will do exactly. There is a side window looking up to the church. I take it, Crump," said Miss Nancy with a joyous promptitude which showed how glad she was to recant, and stay in the place that knew and loved her. And then she hurried home to throw her brother into dire consternation with the news.

"You are doing what you like, Henry, and I shall do what I like," was her strong method of stating her case and setting aside his *veto* when she had interrupted two mild attempts at remonstrance. "It has all arisen out of your own notion of a parish cow. The poor people ought to have milk if they can pay for it, and as nobody else has found it worth while, I am going to sell them milk. Dear Mrs. Denys will give me

the milk of one cow for those who cannot afford to buy."

"Have you settled all this with Mrs. Denys?"

"Dear Mrs. Denys spoke very prettily, Henry. I shall not tell you what she said; but I know that whatever is meant to do good to people that need it will not be frowned on by her."

"Nor by any one else, Nancy," rejoined her brother.

Miss Nancy was touched by the reproachful significance of his voice. "I hope we are not going to be anything but friends, Henry," she said with a gush of feeling. "You are much younger than I am, and Miss Britton is younger still."

"We are children to you—we shall call you the old milk-woman." The rector was relenting.

"I don't care what you call me if you let me have the nether croft for my cows," Miss Nancy retorted, with an eye to business, though full of tears.

"Are you going to keep cows of your own? You will have to keep accounts then—nice difficulties you will get into!"

"I was always rather clever at figures—you have said so yourself, Henry."

"You will have to be more than rather clever if your figures are to balance at the year's end," the rector said, and ceased, reflecting that no argument availed with his sister like a practical defeat, and this he was tolerably sure she would sustain. Perhaps he even hoped it. She was going about the enterprise he had originated in much too independent a temper.

But when he laid the matter before Miss Britton, that lady smiled upon it. Miss

Britton smiled upon everything, approved of everything—of prizes in money, of little good books, of parish cows, of boots and shoes and school pence for fatherless children. Miss Nancy was assuaged, delighted. The outlook was propitious for peace and good-will; and these doles, the rector said, were enough—enough.

The rector spoke both for himself and the squire. Mr. Denys did not like noise and enthusiasm in charity, and strongly deprecated the beginning of that mischievous form of benevolence which attracts to rising places work-folk and tradesfolk who have failed elsewhere. He was not hard on the poverty that comes of sickness or evil chance, and when he requested his wife to take him always into her counsels, which he did on assigning her the cow she had asked for, she was glad that he should show an

interest in her occupations, and had no fear that he would seek to restrain her reasonable kindness. Nor did he, though she presently became aware of a subtle adverse influence striving against her own—the old influence of Mrs. Essex-Brough, which acted on Mr. Denys partly by force of habit, and partly because she took the common and usual view of things, while Delia's view was not seldom singular.

In Delia's judgment there was need of other and better cottages in Cote, and she wanted to have the need supplied by Mr. Denys now, on the plea that when cottage-building was left to small, speculative people, it was done in a cheap, bad way, too often very costly in its results to the poor tenants. Mrs. Essex-Brough volunteered her opinion that cottage property gave no end of trouble, and never paid; and instanced the experi-

ence of her own husband, who was annually out of pocket by his cottages at Lingfield.

And then she offered advice: "The shortest way is to do as my cousin Midas at Cambourne does. Let a piece of land at a perpetual ground-rent of two pounds ten shillings for each cottage built upon it. Then you are quit of responsibility, and are sure of your money without any trouble."

"The ground-rent is too much. Ten shillings is enough. Labourers' cottages ought not to cost more than four pounds a year with a rood of land. They are silly cottages without a garden," Delia replied, unwittingly quoting from very ancient authority.

"If you go back to Queen Elizabeth and the age of sentiment, I give up," said Mrs. Essex-Brough, and made very merry over Mrs. Denys' retrogressive notions.

Delia would not speak of the matter again

in the presence of that lady, but to Mr. Denys she said afterwards: "If you set Mr. Midas before you as an example at all, I hope, Hugh, that it will be as an example to avoid;" at which her husband laughed. Mr. Midas was, perhaps, his favourite aversion—a foolish, weak man, making haste to get rich—but he spoke so little of any of his neighbours that Delia had to learn by observation in what degree he esteemed them—which learning came only by degrees.

Mr. Denys did not come into his wife's plan for the erection of new cottages at that time. Crump refused to admit that any were necessary, and told the squire that there was one at Moffat's Corner to let, which had been empty six months.

"I wish they were all empty at Moffat's Corner," cried Delia. "It is Moffat's Corner I want to have done away."

Moffat's Corner was that *congerie* of hovels in the swampy field at the back of the inn which she had visited in the agent's company, and which Mr. Denys had begged her since to visit no more because disreputable, low people lodged there, and it was the frequent and fatal haunt of fever and other infectious diseases. But as for doing away with it, that seemed utterly out of the question—waste and extravagance in a form never heard of at Cote until this young lady, with nothing to her fortune, conceived and mooted it.

BOOK THE FOURTH.

THE REDEMPTION OF NAVESTOCK.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MEETING OF FRIENDS.

" Constant love is moderate ever,
And it will through life persever. . . .
A suit of durance let it be,
For all weathers." . . .

Mrs. Denys was endeavouring faithfully to fulfil the requirement of the day—the day of small things for her yet, who was capable of such towering hopes and glowing imaginations.

Before that first Christmas season of her married life was over, it was evident to all the world round Cote that Mr. Denys' sons and his little girl were to be regarded as belonging to the family at the Manor House. Mrs. Denys was criticised as too

kind in allowing this, and very singular; and then her singularity was excused on the plea that she had been taken out of a houseful of people when she married, and dulness was a thing she could not endure. Perhaps she said so, and her own words were reported. It never occurred to anybody that the arrangement was made by her desire, and because she felt it right, but the few who began to know her observed that she was happy and contented in it. Marie-Irene appeared often as her gay, little, talkative companion in a walk, and always when she drove in the carriage to pay ceremonious visits. Guests saw her as much made of as if she were Mrs. Denys' own, and met George and John at their father's table, and described them elsewhere as rather foreign, but not bad form. The merits of the youths were recognised where

the active amusements in life were in question, and when Lady Britton invited them to the annual New Year's ball at Marshleas they were considered as safely launched in the society of the neighbourhood. This was a desired event, and a triumph in its way for Mrs. Denys, who had it at heart that they should make themselves friends, and look back to Cote in absence as to a home where their welcome was always ready.

The Manor House was big enough for all, and for more than all who were ever likely to want a lodging there, and Mr. Denys was only too glad to let his wife adopt his children. The social difficulty he resigned to her, who made of it no difficulty at all. Mrs. Denys took a high stand, and permitted no one to repeat to her the criticism of her neighbours, adverse or

otherwise, and thus she escaped the fettering influence of what passes in small places for public opinion, but which is commonly nothing more than the dicta of that public nuisance, the local busy-body.

That Mrs. Denys had a good heart and a great deal of character was the judgment passed upon her by such of her immediate neighbours as had the fullest opportunity of judging, and by Cousin Elizabeth Paul at a distance, who heard from Hugh Denys of all that his young wife was doing for him. At the House with Golden Gables they did not know how much to believe of what reached them by round-about methods; for Delia's letters to her mother contained no mention of the boys or their sister, nor of some other things that were happening to her. It seemed that she was insensibly yielding to

the strong persuasion of her husband, and letting them slip further and further away. Delia would have said that the fault was none of hers. Without seeking she had found a growing aversion in her husband's mind to the very name of them. She was not careful on that account to be silent, but would always speak of her home news, and tell him from whom it came—whether from her mother or from Cricket. The judge had never written to her; but her father wrote from London, and her other brothers at intervals. Altogether she was kept well informed of the family affairs, and if her patience drooped it was presently revived again by anticipations of the spring. "If we do not meet before, we must meet in town; we shall go up for the season, and you must come," she had said to her mother, and her mother had

answered that no light matter should prevent her.

Before the London season began, Delia enjoyed other and delightful changes. An incident happened—trivial it seemed at the time, but it was destined to lead on to great consequences. It befell on a day in February, when the Manor House was quiet again, when little Marie-Irene had gone back to her convent-school, and her brothers had gone to Paris.

Mr. Denys had ridden to the meet that morning with Mr. and Mrs. Essex-Brough, and Delia returning late in the afternoon across the fields from a visit to Widow Blythe at the Orchard—the woman amongst her humble neighbours whom she liked best—was overtaken by them trotting homewards in noisy spirits after a hard run. Delia wore a dark-grey cloak, and she had

pulled the hood over her head to keep out the cold wind. None of them knew her in this costume, but her figure was striking, and after they had passed Mr. Denys looked behind him. When he saw who it was, he cried out, "Delia!" in a tone of mixed surprise and remonstrance, and pulled up. "You are out late, and too far from home," he said.

"A great walk refreshes me, Hugh," was her answer, and she spoke as if she felt vigorous and lively—very much refreshed.

"You should close this path across the fields, Mr. Denys, and then your wife might be out as late as she pleases without any fear of falling in with rough people," Mrs. Essex-Brough said in her loud decisive manner.

"I have no fear, and I like to meet the people—they are our own people," Mrs. Denys replied, and she gave her husband a

sign to ride forward. There was nothing else that he could do, but he had an irksome, annoyed feeling in leaving her to follow alone along the dreary path.

Delia thought nothing of it; she had traversed it often, and she was not alone all the way. Oliver Blythe, the old shepherd at Cote Farm, joined her with his dog, and asked if she could tell him whereabouts on the down his sheep were—a question he had asked her before. She had very long sight, and her direction had once saved him many steps. He walked on with her until their roads parted, giving her his views of things as they were tending towards progress, and working into his monologue many shreds and patches of colour from the ancient history of Cote. Mrs. Denys liked his talk—she liked all that family.

Mr. Denys was fatigued, and at dinner he

said very little; but afterwards he made a proposal to Delia in a manner that pleased her: "I have been thinking that you get less than your fair share of our country pleasures. What do you say to a month's foreign travel before we go to London? Suppose we start next week, and arrive in Rome before Easter."

Delia was enraptured, and showed her gratitude with affectionate enthusiasm. Her proud reserve was much abated since her marriage, and the loss of it was a gain to her in loveliness, in grace, in happiness—in a thousand charming ways.

"Then it is settled," responded her husband in a tone of satisfaction; and within half an hour he had marked their route, had brought itineraries to instruct her of what was chiefly to be observed on it, and sketches of his own in illustration.

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"I think, Hugh, you have been everywhere," she said. And, indeed, he had been wherever he meant to carry her on this journey.

When Mr. Denys apprized Mrs. Essex-Brough of his sudden departure, she looked down and said he was wise to show his wife something of the world. "She has seen nothing and she sees nothing—'Qui ne voit rien n'a rien a dire,'" she quoted with that freedom of personal comment and criticism in which she indulged.

"You don't quite know Delia yet," Mr. Denys said in a tone to stop the familiarity.

Delia's friends at Auldcaster were agreeably surprised when her first letter from beyond the Channel arrived at the House with Golden Gables. She wrote it at Amiens, her second was from Paris, and

she wrote a third time on reaching Rome. Cricket was the honoured recipient of these letters, because Delia could give no details of the immense enjoyment she was having without frequent reference to her husband, and Cricket's prejudice against Mr. Denys was materially abated by his affection for his sister.

"She is in glorious spirits. I expect we shall find an improvement in Delia when we meet," her mother remarked with tender joy.

Then there was an interval that seemed long, and their next news of her came from Knowle—sent by her Cousin Fanny. Lady Herrick had met Mr. Denys one Sunday in Rome as she was leaving the English church, and had inquired for his wife. Delia was not well, he said, and she was keeping quiet. He was carrying home a

pot of white hyacinths to gladden her eyes in prison—so he said, and nothing more.

And they heard nothing more until they heard from Delia herself. This time it was her mother who had the letter. Delia did not allude to any illness; she said only that their return would be delayed a week or two beyond the date that they had originally fixed, because she found Italy so charming, but they hoped to be in London before the end of May—if not before the birthday Drawing-room.

"She is intending to be presented," Lady Daventry said. "One of the rich citizens' wives will present her." This was her way of intimating that she would not do her granddaughter that favour, and Delia's mother had never been presented.

The younger lady coloured and said: "I think, gran'ma, you ought to do what she asks you—but she may not ask you."

Said the judge to his old wife: "If Delia is to go to court, it is your place to go with her."

There the difference stood until Mr. and Mrs. Denys were actually in town, domiciled in the house of Sir Oliver Denys, that rich citizen who had been once Lord Mayor. Sir Oliver was kept in the country on account of his feeble health, and Cousin Elizabeth Paul had suggested the offer of his town-house to the head of the family, who was not yet provided.

Mrs. Denys came to London for the season in a perfect humour to enjoy its pleasures. She had acquired just enough experience to know that it would not be wise to put her trust in the world, or to make society her stay. "One is nobody in London," she said to her husband with a touching simplicity.

Mr. Denys had taken pains with her while

they were abroad. In Paris she had heard the finest music; in Rome she had seen the noblest pictures, and had learnt enough of antiquity to give her a taste, and furnish her with understanding and answers when these were the topics of conversation. Her memory was excellent, and she was cultivating, rather tardily, a habit of attention. "Without that you will be my dear dunce to the end of the chapter!" her husband had once cried out a little impatiently when she was letting her eyes wander while she listened to a longish exposition on the Schools of Painting. Since then she had begun to regard it as her duty to be gracefully accomplished, and to despise nothing that he cared to teach her.

The possession of Sir Oliver Denys' house gave them many advantages. It was perfectly appointed, and not too large; and looking across a garden into the Park was

pleasantly quiet and cheerful at all times of the day.

They arrived in town in the morning, and the same night went to one of the smaller theatres to see a popular piece that was having a great run. Delia had not often sat at a play, and it seemed very real and affecting to her. She forgot herself, and showed all her tender sympathy in her face. Hers was a new face, but Mr. Denys' was well known to several people there, who, having heard of his marriage, supposed that to be the lady, in a half-high black dress, with a string of Roman gold beads round her throat. A great dame of his county, a great dame of the old style, who was on speaking terms with much worse characters than Mr. Denys, took a note of Delia as classically perfect in form and feature, and very noble in expression, and the next day sent a letter to her grand-

mother, inquiring under whose wing Mrs. Denys was going to the Drawing-room, and proposing—if to come to London for the occasion did not suit Lady Daventry—to carry her there under her own.

Lady Daventry was checkmated. She had made no response to Delia's hint of invitation to herself, and she knew that to be introduced by "Duchess Adela" would give her the pass-key of the innermost circles of that curiously constituted world within a world—"the best society"—the paradise so many long for, and never reach. She declined to go to London on the plea that her duty would be better done by the old duchess, but Delia's mother went, and the judge.

There was something almost childish, and perhaps even a little hysterical, in Delia's joy at embracing her mother again. She still blushed under her grandfather's eye, and

her tongue faltered. "It is nothing but pain to see gran'papa now," she said petulantly when the first interview was over. At their next meeting she was scarcely more composed—that was when she stopped for a few minutes on her way to St. James's. Mr. Denys was in the carriage with her, but would not go upstairs.

"I am come, mamma, as you wished me," she said, and stood at a distance to be viewed.

The judge put on his spectacles. "Is it so very splendid?" he inquired, critically inspecting her court-dress, which was quiet in effect, though in taste perfect—that was Delia's taste, a simplicity that became her.

"It is not very splendid, gran'papa," she answered, and made him a fine curtsey to carry off her confusion.

Her petticoat was of satin, ivory-tinted, and

the train of satin delicately brocaded with gold; and her ornaments were the filigree gold beads again. Her mother had expected to see pearls and diamonds—but Delia had no diamonds.

Her father entered from the next room with a pen in his fingers. He looked her over, and nodded a good-humoured approval. "It is very pretty—I wish Cricket were here to see you," he said. "I am very busy—good-bye," and he disappeared again.

"To-day Mrs. Denys of Cote begins her career as a leader of fashion?" the judge questioned, half to himself, reflectively.

"No, gran'papa, it is not upon that stage I shall have to play my part," Delia responded in a like subdued voice. Then she kissed her mother, and the next moment was gone again.

A prolonged silence succeeded her depar-

ture. Her mother trembled, and had much ado to restrain her tears. "She would be quite happy if it were not for her separation from us," she said at length. "Mr. Denys is good to her, or she would not have that sunny peace in her face she has. I know Delia."

"Thank God she is happy—pray that it may last," the judge replied. "As for her separation from us—you have asked her to come home, and she has not come. She has not asked you—nor any of you—to go to Cote. Mr. Denys is master. If she have need of you, some day he will send — till then be satisfied that she is permitted to write, and to see you as she did yesterday and to-day. It is not much, but it is better than nothing."

"Indeed, it is. And I can bear the rest while I see her in health, and know that

life is not made hard to her. But I wish, and so does she, that we were all friends together."

To this the judge gave no answer. He was quite contented that Mr. Denys should keep them all at a distance.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MEETING OF FOES.

"In time small wedge will cleave the sturdiest oak;
In time the marble wears with weakest showers."

Mrs. Denys prophesied truly when she spoke on the impulse of the moment, and said that it was not as a leader of fashion she would have to play her part on the world's stage. She had her vogue for a season, was talked of, followed and admired: a woman of great beauty and fine understanding—that was her character. She had not a spark of coquetry. To be always dancing and always gay did not please her, and she took her permanent place in the graver

phases of society. Introduced by "Duchess Adela," she had every advantage. That grand old lady professed to have fallen in love with her, and was known to be steady in her likings. She was civil to Mr. Denys, and had been civil always. She approved of the generous part that his young wife had taken towards his children, and was contemptuous of the minor magnates of the county who had not called upon them on their marriage. "Mr. Denys is not good enough for some of his neighbours at Cote? I should like to see the man who cast the first stone at him," cried she, with derision sparkling in her shrewd black eyes. And she invited Mr. and Mrs. Denys to meet her best company.

Delia was not elated, but she was glad. At that little house in Mayfair she was welcome at any hour of the day. Duchess

Adela had no children left—they had died all in early middle life—and not many of her contemporaries survived. Soon after their intimacy began, she said to Mrs. Denys with a touch of nature that levelled the distinctions of rank: "The world is growing thin for me. I am happy to have found *you*. We need one another. We can do one another good. And that is a safe bond of friendship." Delia kissed her. "I will be a daughter to you," she said. And she was like a daughter to her.

Duchess Adela spoke and wrote of her new acquisition with enthusiasm. The Lady Laura Hayman, who had neglected Mrs. Denys in the country, was taken to task, and was sorry, but pleaded that a wife must hold with her husband. She held with hers so loyally that she adopted all his friendships and enmities, and was friends

or strangers with their neighbours just as he willed.

Colonel Hayman was not a very wise man. He was fond of popularity, and was called good-natured and liberal. People who did not like him—and Mr. Denys was one of these—said that his acts of liberality were acts of business, done with a long view to the future representation of the county. Duchess Adela reasoned that Mr. Denys would not stand in Colonel Hayman's way as candidate for the county, but the Navestock interest might be brought to bear against him, and the prudent policy would be to begin in time to win it over. Prompted by kind intentions, she made the initiatory manœuvre by arranging that they should come together unexpectedly at her round table.

The gentlemen had an old quarrel between

them which need not be entered into in this place. It was purely a man's quarrel, and had been the end of a comradeship that dated from the playing fields at Rugby. They confronted each other for an instant with the sullen defiance of two strong dogs that have had a grand fight once upon a time, and would fall to again but for the disciplinary whip that makes both dog and men behave themselves in special places.

The Lady Laura looked hot and flurried, but the disciplinary whip coerced her also, and she was not more abrupt than was her manner when nervous. Mrs. Denys was prepared. She had thought the experiment hazardous, but was not afraid for her side. "Hugh will be no more moved than a rock," she said. "I am sure of Hugh—perhaps I may shake a little." She did shake a little, but her confidence in her

husband was sustained. His blue eyes stared full and bright at his adversary, who had grown amazingly fat, and then a smile broke over his face—not a quite pleasant smile for those who understood it—but Colonel Hayman, who was short-sighted and more confounded than the other, offered his hand. Mr. Denys gave his, and the conversation at dinner never came to a pause for either of them.

The other guests were Mr. and Mrs. James Herrick of Knowle, young people in request everywhere, and Mr. North, the artist, who was invited for the purpose of studying Mrs. Denys, with a view to that portrait which has been reckoned since his death as one of the finest, if not the very finest, that he ever painted. Mr. and Mrs. James Herrick were taken by surprise. Fanny blushed painfully. Delia whispered: "Well met at last!"

There were recurrent moments of uneasiness through the evening, but the bold manœuvre of Duchess Adela was on the whole a success. She had given her guests who desired it the opportunity of making new beginnings, and to some extent the opportunity was improved. Old foes and friends grown cool had met on neutral territory, and exchanged preliminaries of peace. In the autumn, when everybody was at home in the country again, there was a prospect that peace might be ratified.

Mrs. Denys' noble air stood her in good stead. Colonel Hayman wondered at Mr. Denys' luck. At this period her frame of mind was such that small matters did not disturb her. She did not appreciate why Lady Laura's notice was so coveted. To see her Cousin Fanny was a simple satisfaction that had no drawback. When she

was less happy than now, her nearest and dearest had used her less than kindly, and strangers had copied their example, but she felt no sort of resentment because of that. If she was injured, it was never her nature to strike again. She had no heart for revenges; her circumstances were changed, and all she longed for was that their state of alienation should end.

She pursued a method of her own to end it. While the judge and her mother were in town, she went to them every day, and timed her visits for the best chance of finding her father there. She never offered any apology for not inviting them to come to her—it was enough if she could get over one difficulty at once. Duchess Adela had a health-prescription for a walk in the morning early, which she took in the Park, so many miles after breakfast,

and Mrs. Denys walked with her regularly. The judge joined them on several occasions, out for his constitutional at the same hour. Mr. Denys let Delia go her own way in this free of comment. He went his way too, and that way was as far as he could get from his wife's family. What hopes he had built on them were dead and buried. They might have helped him, and they had acted as believing him incapable of good. He was angry and proud and unforgiving in his turn. It was a pity for all sakes, but retaliation is the common law of men, and he felt no longer any need of them.

A great indiscriminate crowd of idle people was always a bore and a nuisance to Mr. Denys, but he had in London, Paris, and Rome a wide acquaintance amongst public and professional people,

and a few dear and distinguished intimacies. Delia met and was received by these friends of her husband with cordial respect, and she took to them far more kindly than to the fashionable sort. Sir Oliver's town-house had every requisite for the entertainment of society, and in their occupation it grew famous, by and by, as a house where the guests were really amused. Their hospitalities were without ostentation, frequent and easy, and Mrs. Denys, being happy and pleased herself, had the fortunate gift of making her company feel at their best. Already, during this her first season, she began to strike out that line of her own to which she adhered with conspicuous grace and success when her brief day of fashion and novelty had waned. It came to be said that people worth knowing were to be met at the table of Mr. and Mrs.

Denys; not alone the stars newly discovered, and destined to fall, perhaps, from the firmament of their heaven after the dazzle of a season, but the luminaries that had been shining a long while and promised to go on shining—luminaries foreign, political, artistic, literary, and lovely. As these grew more numerous, Mrs. Denys instituted her Thursday evenings for receiving visitors, a custom that she never afterwards intermitted, and which she carried into the country with a difference to accommodate it to country hours and country habits, keeping it of afternoons in the Dutch garden as long as the warm weather continued, and later on, when Cote rose to the dignity and enjoyment of a winter season, in her pleasant drawing-room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AT SAYES COURT.

"Money is a good servant, but a dangerous master."—BOUHOURS.

WHEN Sir Oliver Denys' house was lent for the season to the head of the family the fact was noted, and by one person invidiously noted.

"To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance," prophesied that wild slip of the old Denyses who had contended with Mr. Denys of Cote for the Navestock succession.

His sinister meaning was reported to his adversary. Its effect on Mr. Denys was remarkable. It took away his breath like

a sudden blow. He did not speak for full ten minutes after. His countenance was as if some passion dormant in him had awakened, and was coming to the light. When he opened his mouth his words were uttered slowly and with difficulty: "Go back to poor Ralph, and say, that if Sir Oliver leave his half million of money to me, to set up Navestock again, I shall be neither glad nor sorry. I shall know that there's a fate in it."

Men do not ardently covet what they have no hope or expectation of reaching, and while the release of Navestock from the encumbrances which reduced it to a mere nominal possession was impossible by any effort of his own, the desire of it had not entered into Mr. Denys' mind. And he did not welcome it now. If it came, it came — as a recurrent thought comes, pestering us in the midst of other things—and for the pre-

sent he did not take his wife into his confidence. But a whisper is enough to make of such a secret a common rumour in interested circles, and before it was a week old there was not a Denys, at home or abroad, in town or country, who had not heard it.

Delia heard it from her father, and was moved almost as much as her husband was. She asked him if he believed it. Mr. Denys said : " Neither Sir Oliver nor Cousin Elizabeth Paul ever gave me reason to suppose that I should take anything under his will. His own relations and his late wife's relations are legion. The family have conjectured that Cousin Elizabeth Paul would get the lion's share — without inquiring what she would do with it. Probably no one except his lawyer knows what sort of will Sir Oliver has made. They are playing 'Faust' at Covent Garden to night.

Let us go and hear some beautiful music, and put money out of our heads." Delia understood that he would discourage idle speculation on what both felt to be a great matter.

Sir Oliver Denys was reported very feeble, and some declared that his death was imminent. Sayes Court was no more than a three hours' drive from London, but Mr. Denys had never been accustomed to go there unless invited. Nor did he offer to go now. "If Sir Oliver wants us, Cousin Elizabeth Paul will send," he said to Delia, and not another word.

Nevertheless the expectation was much in his mind, and in hers also. But they were not sent for until they were about to leave town, and go home to Cote for a fortnight, intending after that to go to Scotland.

Sir Oliver Denys was not so far advanced on the road to that bourne whence there is no returning as impatient persons said.

He was a wiry old man who meant to go on living as long as he lived. That summer he kept much out of doors. Sayes Court was on the verge of the heath country of Surrey, where the fine air is the very breath of health. The house stood flat upon the ground—a long, low house with tiled roofs and imperfect battlements, built a hundred and fifty years ago. It had been beautified by Sir Oliver when he bought the place to please his wife, and left since he lost her almost without needful repairs. After that event he had seldom stayed there longer than a day until the present year, when he fancied that the quiet suited him, and in the long interval of his avoidance it had got to look like an uninhabited house. The approach was from the north by a straight avenue of lime-trees, leaving a deep ditch on either side and meadows beyond.

There was a grass-plot with a sun-dial opposite the door, and under the porch were stone seats. There was no view from this front, and the shutters were permanently closed. A broad paved walk was carried round the house on all the four sides of it. To the west a gate gave entrance to a semi-circular garden bounded by a lofty wall covered with neglected fruit-trees. This walled garden was a complete wilderness. The paths were lost in grass, and grass choked the borders. Here and there a red rose tossed its blossoms into the sunshine, and a vivid spike of snap-dragon triumphed over the rank weeds. In one spot a Spanish jessamine fell in a confused heap of fragrance about the pedestal of a statue thrown down and broken. It was not a pleasant place, and on that side of the house also the shutters were permanently closed—white shutters with gilded

mouldings and large plate-glass windows that opened on the pavement, and indicated apartments of some pretension.

The inhabited part of the house was to the south, looking upon a green court with a fountain in the midst. The yew hedge had been cut low to let in the sun, and give a distant view of the church spire and some cottages. This front of the house consisted of a centre and two wings. In the west wing, floriated from base to battlement with magnolias, were all the rooms that served as living-rooms to Sir Oliver and Cousin Elizabeth Paul, his man and her maid. A spacious hall, wainscoted and ceiled with wood, occupied the entire centre; and in the east wing were the offices and servants' quarters.

It was hot July weather when Mr. and Mrs. Denys came to Sayes Court, arriving in the afternoon. Sir Oliver and Cousin

Elizabeth Paul were sitting out in the weedy garden, with a rug under their feet, and the broad shadow of a cedar-tree over their heads. Not far off was the circular stone basin and the fountain that had ceased to play. The damask roses were in bloom, and bees hummed multitudinous in the limes. The lady was reading aloud to the old man.

"Two solitary people who love one another," said Mrs. Denys while they were yet out of hearing. Then they were descried, the book was thrown down, and Sir Oliver, a tall, lean figure, bent from the shoulders, stepped across the grass with the careful, slow feet of old age to meet them.

His accost to Delia was most courteous, and to her husband it was that of a kinsman who feels friendly; but his chief interest was centred in her. He did not say many words then—it was his hour to rest before

dinner—but after dinner, in the cool of the evening, he invited her to take a walk with him, in the green lanes which are a labyrinth of loveliness in summer round Sayes Court. Roofs and chimney-stacks and ornamental trees were frequent behind the tall hedges, and here and there, through gates and palings, were glimpses of ivied porches, and verandahs trellised with all manner of sweetness, and lawns where people were resting and playing, and measuredly pacing to and fro. The Chertsey bells were chiming far away beyond the river. A waggon piled aloft with golden sheaves passed by, and a troop of men and women tired. Then they came to a gate into the newly reaped field, and a foot-path through the stubble leading to Chertsey. The town lay behind a broken screen of thick trees, and the sky above it was flooded with lustrous, pale light.

It was perfect peace and perfect beauty—a scene that Delia remembered for ever. They went along the pathway across the field, Mr. Denys and Cousin Elizabeth Paul following, in earnest conversation together.

Cousin Elizabeth Paul was saying:—"Listen to me, Hugh. This is why you have come—you must help Sir Oliver to do a thing that he has made up his mind to do. We have talked it over by ourselves and with Mr. Quorn until absolutely the last word has been said. We agree that I should be overwhelmed by what the load imposed on me in Sir Oliver's old will has grown to now, and if he were to make a new will in your favour it might be disputed on the ground of incapacity and undue influence. His money stands in great heaps, and (pass me a quotation) 'money is like muck, not good unless it be spread.'

Let him spread it over Navestock, and he may live to see it fertilise a thousand barren acres. After the heavy mortgages are paid off you may begin to do your duty by the land, and you can hardly begin before. So to-morrow morning when he speaks to you, and bids you give the mortgagees notice, I pray you, spare him the fatigue of argument, and let it be done."

Mr. Denys was gazing steadfastly at the two figures going on in front—the old man and his own young wife, two shades against the primrose sky. "Tell me, Cousin Elizabeth Paul, do I owe this to Delia?" he said in a low voice.

"I think you will owe her more and better than this, Hugh, before you see death. But I will not fence with you—Sir Oliver calls her a beautiful character, and he keeps his belief in the good influence of good women."

"Will there be any conditions? any price to pay?"

"There will be no conditions. There will be no price to pay. You need to be set more at liberty, and that will carry you beyond his range of experience. He was one of the merchant adventurers in his day, such as in old times were ennobled; but he owns no land except the few fields round about Sayes Court, and he lets them go. I think he rather prefers a wilderness as reminding him of foreign places. I know that he was never concerned to have his gardens neat and well-ordered plots; and now he has insensibly slipped back into his early habits of simplicity, when a guinea in his pocket was not mere gold but splendid wealth, and Acklam his holy of holies."

"He was born at Acklam of course—I had not remembered that. How many years ago?"

"Eighty-six years ago. And he enjoys his life yet. He has kept a good conscience to be the kindly nurse of his old age."

The Chertsey bells, which had lulled for a while, broke out again, and Sir Oliver and Delia stopped in their quiet talk to listen. Twilight was creeping over the fields, all was turning grey. He had been telling her of when he was a boy, and some of the precepts that his mother taught him, which he had never forgotten, and had done his best to put into practice. When the others came up with them, they all faced about and retraced their way, he flowing on with gentle garrulity, pleased to speak, pleased to be heard with deserved respect.

"'Sweep before your own door'—that I recollect as one of her favourite recommendations to people wanting to do good. I don't believe that she ever went out of sight

of home to do good herself, but her hands seemed always full with the poor she knew. Her principle will stretch across doorways that are exceeding wide—as wide as yours, Hugh Denys. The power of life and death is still in the hands of those who hold the soil, and is further reaching and used more truthlessly, I fear, than ever it was in the days of feudal lords and serfs."

Delia, who had taken her husband's arm, felt him draw a long breath. Perhaps he was searching the annals of his memory for some act or deed of his own in illustration of Sir Oliver's remarks—if he sought well, he found it.

The old man continued: "People talk of being haunted—I have been haunted half my lifetime by a man I once saw standing at the corner of a street. He looked at me without speaking, but I understood him. He had been ill, and was in want—evidently a

man who had come down in the world. I was in haste, going about my business, and I went on, but not far—I could not get away from the pitiful plea in the man's eyes, and I was forced to turn back. You will guess that when I reached the corner of the street he was gone, and though I sought him all the day after, and made many subsequent inquiries, I was never able to find him again. That now was a neglect of my good mother's principle of sweeping before one's own door —an opportunity lost of doing God service. God never gave me another quite like it."

Whether Sir Oliver meant Mr. Denys to apply the moral of his reminiscences, or whether he was just running on because he had begun, and had a kind audience, did not appear. But he talked next of threadbare old adages, and the various strands of truth that they are found to be woven of

when ravelled out—the willing horse, for instance. He said that in his observation God put upon no man more than he was able to do or to carry if he was willing, and the more willing God saw men for good work the more and better work He gave them to do. Life, he thought, repeated itself, and the conduct of men was less inconsistent taken on the whole than it might seem when taken in short views. That priest in the parable, he believed, would contrive always to pass by on the other side and not see the painful service waiting to be done; that Levite would have always the same idle curiosity that looks without any desire to succour; and that Samaritan would as likely never journey but he would find some poor wounded soul to give a lift to.

CHAPTER XXV.

WITHOUT CONDITIONS?

"A wise man will make more opportunities than he finds."—BACON.

THE following morning towards eleven o'clock Mr. Denys was called to Sir Oliver's sitting-room.

"Come with me, Delia. I have no interest or concern that is not yours as well," he said to her; and Delia, laying aside the fine needlework in which her fingers still delighted, accompanied him in a serious exalted frame.

With Sir Oliver was his lawyer, Mr. Quorn, in front of whom were arranged numerous papers, a small packet of letters,

and writing materials. He looked penetratingly at the young lady, seemed satisfied with his inspection, and listened to Mr. Denys' plea for her presence.

"She has a good memory, Sir Oliver, and as in the course of nature she must outlive me, it will fall to her to carry on your experiment." And then he recited that clause in their marriage-deeds which had proved to her family in opposition the high respect he had for her intellectual and practical powers. Mr. Quorn looked at the young lady a second time, and his favourable impression was strengthened and confirmed.

Cousin Elizabeth Paul had taken her seat at Sir Oliver's right hand, and Mr. Denys faced them with Delia by his side. The lawyer was at the upper end of the table, his documents all in order, ready to open the day's business. He began by reading

from a sheet before him Sir Oliver's plan for the redemption of Navestock. The bulk of the money which he proposed to apply to it had grown from the old man's early subscriptions to some of those grand enterprises of public utility which have been long a part of national civilisation. There had been in the beginning risk for the furtherance of good ends, but these ends being permanently achieved, and the stock in request by trustees and others as a steady investment, Sir Oliver judged that his money might well be spared to serve another wise, speculative purpose. His plan was direct, and simple, and complete. Mr. Denys heard it without interruption, wearing a gravely neutral air — a man likes to have his property released from encumbrances, but Mr. Denys could not credit yet that the gift of release was a free gift.

Mr. Quorn handed him that sheet, and proceeded to recite from another the terms on which certain persons coming next in the entail, failing lawful issue of himself, were prepared to sell their prospective rights. Here Sir Oliver spoke in explanation.

"I want your hands to be loosed, that none but your very own may have it in their power to say you yea or nay as to what you shall do or leave undone at Navestock."

Cousin Elizabeth Paul was regarding Mr. Denys attentively. Mr. Denys glanced at her and laughed: "Let me know the root of the matter," he said. "Behind this wonderful generosity of Sir Oliver there is surely some pious enthusiasm of our good cousin Elizabeth Paul."

Mr. Quorn took up the packet of letters, and offered them to Mr. Denys: "Here are

four letters from Guy Francis Meade, serving with his regiment in India."

Sir Oliver spoke again: "You remember what I told you about him, Hugh? He is that intrepid, handsome lad who came to us, sentenced to the desk for want of money to open him a career more to his liking. He could not abide it, and took it into his head to enlist. There have been rude times in India lately, and he has earned his commission."

"Yes, I remember," Mr. Denys said, and proceeded deliberately to open and read the letters.

They were the brief matter-of-fact letters of a young soldier in answer to the respectful investigations of a stranger who had an interest in him—letters of thanks for some offer of help that was pressed but not accepted. The last of the four affirmed the

writer's satisfaction in his life as it was, and said in a few animated phrases that he could look neither behind nor before him—the regiment was just going into action, and he could attend only to the duty of the day.

"For his next news we may consult the papers," Mr. Denys said, and gave the letters to his wife.

Mr. Quorn intimated that they might keep them. If the correspondence was to be continued, that would be their affair.

Mr. Denys had enough to reflect on. The obvious moral of Sir Oliver's plan for the redemption of Navestock was that the Meades, and especially this plucky young fellow who had gone soldiering to India in the ranks, should replace in the entail those Denyses of Kent who were willing to sell their prospective rights for an immediate consideration. If he acquiesced in it

there would be a strong compulsion laid upon him to carry out in some present, practical shape the justice that Sir Oliver wanted to have done. Sir Oliver did not say so much, but that was a part of his meaning, and Mr. Denys understood it without direct statement. He felt that his old kinsman's wishes must be held sacred, but he made no haste to offer promises. He just said with an air of not having yet recovered from his astonishment that he supposed he ought to accept the release which Sir Oliver was ready to give.

Mr. Quorn seemed amused by the inadequacy of his words to the event, but the others, who knew Mr. Denys better, were satisfied. Sir Oliver himself was satisfied, and Cousin Elizabeth Paul was the same.

"That is all I require for the moment," Sir Oliver said, and looked towards Mrs.

Denys, whose lovely thankfulness made up for any defect of eloquence in her husband.

Delia had a great walk on the heath with him in the afternoon, and a great talk about the good thing that was happening to them. Mr. Denys had settled with Mr. Quorn the necessary preliminaries, and was possibly tired of the subject; for he was very quiet.

"You are dull, Hugh. I am all joyous. What is the difference between you and me?" Delia cried in a tone of tender impatience.

"Five-and-twenty years, love, five-and-twenty years," Mr. Denys answered, and laughed a little at her fresh enthusiasm.

"Put them out of mind, Hugh—I never think of them. We are the happiest married people of my acquaintance." Delia was, indeed, sensible of no drawback in her present content.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SON AND HEIR.

"Be not greedy to add money to money : but let it be as refuse in respect of our child.
For that which the Lord hath given us to live with doth suffice us."

Mr. and Mrs. Denys went from Sayes Court to Scotland as they had previously arranged, and then went home to Cote for the winter. Mrs. Denys expressed herself as glad to be in the country again, and resumed her active occupations with her customary spirit. Mr. Clarges was married by this time, and the parish cows were in full employment under Miss Nancy. Danesmore was re-opened, and Sir John Herrick made an effort to be more

neighbourly this Christmas than the last—an effort which Lady Herrick warmly seconded. Colonel and Lady Laura Hayman copied the example in their own manner, and most of the other obtrusive blanks in the visiting list at the Manor House were filled up within a week of its becoming generally known that Duchess Adela had slept a night there. There were possibly ulterior views in the condescension of some great and good persons, but Mr. and Mrs. Denys set up no self-denying ordinance by way of retaliation on those who had shown themselves unfriendly. Their circumstances were, indeed, such as naturally dispose the mind towards the forgiveness of injuries.

The redemption of Navestock was being effected as Sir Oliver Denys had designed, and by what seemed to many a happy concurrence of events an heir to all this greatness was born on the very day in March when the

title-deeds were restored to Mr. Denys. The old discoloured parchments were brought to the Manor House at Cote by Mr. Quorn, who carried back the glad tidings of the boy's birth to Sir Oliver at Sayes Court. Hugh Oliver was the name given to the child in memory of the old merchant's munificence; and as soon as the new mother could travel, Mr. Denys convoyed them into Surrey in compliance with his anxious desire to see them.

The visit was long enough to give others of the family who wished to do so the opportunity of confirming the impression of goodwill which their hospitality had made upon Mrs. Denys at the time of her marriage. Most of them used it, and drove out to Sayes Court, bringing pious offerings to the baby, and their free opinion that as Sir Oliver had a right to please himself in the distribution of the fortune he had won, setting up Navestock again was a

splendid act, in the honour and glory of which all his kinsfolk might in a manner participate.

This was brave speaking, but was Navestock to be set up again with Sir Oliver's money? that was the question. The county expected it to ensue as a matter of course, and such of Mrs. Denys' friends as remembered her ambition in the days of her vanity looked that it would take now a fresh and vigorous departure. But nothing was heard of that, though another thing was presently heard of that made a nine days' wonder at Beauminster and wherever Mr. Denys' neighbours met to talk. The rector of Navestock died suddenly in his retreat at Ems, and the name of the new rector, gazetted the following week, was Meade—the Rev. Arthur Meade, sometime curate of Clogger in Lincolnshire, a rugged young man, but quite up to his duties, and extremely delighted to get a good benefice in

his own county, no matter though Mr. Denys was the patron.

The late rector had put obstacles in the way of dealing with the neglected and ruinous church, but his successor gladly admitted the claim of old Sir Oliver to restore or re-edify the building if he pleased; and they worked so thoroughly together that the living was further enriched by the wealthy citizen with a new parsonage-house, a parochial-room, national schools, a row of alms-houses, and a nondescript mansion for a village club. The parish was very wide, and had been as much and as long left to itself as any in the kingdom, but the young incumbent began his labours with a good courage and promised before many years were over to have it well in hand.

What Sir Oliver Denys did he did quickly, as a man works when he has no time to waste. He was at Cote that summer, where

Mr. and Mrs. Denys stayed mostly at home. A few weeks of May and June were spent in London, and again at Sir Oliver's house. Mrs. Daventry did not come to town with the judge that season; and as the year went on, Mrs. Denys felt naturally a great wish to carry her boy to Auldcaster to show him to her own people. She was both a prouder and a humbler woman in her sweet maturity than ever she had been before, and on a pathetic plea from her mother, Mr. Denys reluctantly consenting, she went with her heart open to give and get the comfort of complete reconciliation.

The visit was a failure. Delia got nothing but a complete disappointment. The judge's prejudice was more apparent than in the worst period before her marriage, and her grandmother's tone was more caustic.

Mr. Denys chose to lodge himself and his belongings at the White Hart, to be free

of the restraint of his wife's family, but he let her be with them as much as she pleased. She began by being with them nearly the whole day long, but the joy did not last. An unexpected bitterness was infused into her cup of happiness at Auldcaster. Mr. Denys, when he was first congratulated on the redemption of Navestock, had freely ascribed it to the influence of his wife with Sir Oliver. This was capable of two interpretations, and without active malice or wickedness, the worst interpretation came to be the one most generally accepted. The judgment recorded against Delia before her marriage as a manœuvrer for money's sake, was brought up against her now, and confirmed. She had not the philosophic temper that endures calmly to be misunderstood. She hid her wrong from her husband, but her indignation waxed hot against her foes of her own house.

"What does grandmamma imagine that she sits impatiently mute whenever Navestock is mentioned?" she asked the judge. He advised her not to inquire. Delia took it that what her grandmother imagined, he did not discredit, and she turned upon him with a haughty defiance equally strange to her face and her feelings.

The French Madam smiled proudly still from her station above the fireplace in the withdrawing-room, and the girls from the rectory said that evening Cousin Delia was more than ever like the picture. Delia was not flattered by the comparison now. And Cricket was unkind. He had amused himself sadly since the birth of his sister's little son in making out a dismal roll of the heirs to Navestock who had come under the curse of blood, and paid the forfeit by violent, premature, and unknown deaths. He

showed it to her more in thoughtlessness than aught else, but it was the cruelest blow that had been dealt her yet. All the next day she sat with her mother in the little white room that had been her own, where the crewel worked hangings had been fresh hung for her coming. Asleep or awake, the baby was there too—a beautiful child, blessed with the serenest disposition. For her mother's sake Delia held her peace from complaining, but her heart was sorer than sore. The same evening, when her husband wanted to know how soon she would be ready to go back to Cote, she answered that she was ready to go as soon as he liked. He saw that she was hurt and angry, but supposed it to be on his account as it had been before, and she left him under his mistake.

There was a sharp chill in the air the morn-

ing they left Auldcaster, aud somebody was anxious lest baby should not be warm enough.

"Give me your old shawl, mother, to wrap him in, and I will leave you this of mine," Delia said, and hastily effected the exchange. Her mother offered no plea or resistance—there were tears in both their eyes. Delia's shawl was Indian, costly and rich; the other was a soft Shetland thing often washed, but it had a value not to be reckoned at money's worth.

Mr. Denys, as his way was, did not choose to see his wife's tears, but he was very sorry for her. He rode by the carriage to keep her company till the worst pang of parting was over, then trotted forward to be at Beauminster first, that her comfort and the child's might be prepared when they arrived. Delia had a sense of being cared for by her husband that consoled her. In consenting

to bring her to Auldcaster he had given for his reason a doubt whether she would ever rest from hankering after her old home until she had re-visited it, and suffered a new sorrow in its changes. When they were back at Cote he spoke of the visit in its results.

"Some wounds, though they heal, are always tender to the touch, and such a wound you got before you married me," he said. "Choose now one of two things—keep away from what hurts you, or try to harden your heart against the pain."

"I will keep away from what hurts me, dear Hugh. I never could harden my heart against the pain," was Delia's answer. "And I don't believe that I shall ever care to see the House with Golden Gables again."

The world for the most part admires money, and is not too curious to inquire how it was come by; but it loves to air

its speculations, which are not seldom of an injurious character, when there is room for doubt. It was hard upon Mrs. Denys that she should be talked of amongst friends as smitten already by the curse of Navestock, but it is certain that she was so talked of. There exists in many minds a latent superstition that makes them soft to receive such impressions, and in her own family there was the fear before, and the shaken faith.

Duchess Adela was not one of the susceptible natures, and she advised Mrs. Denys to say no word in exculpation of herself: "Those who are prejudiced and those who are envious will only smile and wink and nod, and whisper that you don't know your own heart. Just let them say. Against such whisperings there is no argument like a noble life."

BOOK THE FIFTH.

THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH.

CHAPTER XXVII.

YEAR BY YEAR.

"The ways to enrich are many. . . . The improvement of the ground is the most natural obtaining of riches; for it is our great mother's blessing, the earth's; but it is slow."—BACON.

SIR OLIVER DENYS survived the redemption of Navestock nearly three years. He was buried with his wife in a London cemetery, but a fine brass, in the chancel of Navestock Church, sets forth his name and benefactions to the parish for a sacred example to posterity.

Mr. Denys of Cote took nothing under his will. Sir Oliver's town-house had been his by deed of gift since the previous summer, and no work was provided for the lawyers to do because of him. The will gave

on the whole satisfaction to the family and its connections. Handsome bequests fell to many non-expectant young people, amongst others—by a codicil added in the last year of the testator's life—to John Robert, Arthur, and Guy Francis Meade. Cousin Elizabeth Paul was residuary legatee. She was not so rich in the end as some had predicted, but she had enough, and it was very gratifying to Mr. Denys and his wife when she announced her wish to go and live at Cote, to be under Delia's wing in her old age. A pretty rustic place was found for her on the road to the Orchard, where the view was open and the air bracing, and there she settled—one more added to the inner circle of dear and constant friends whom Mrs. Denys was gathering round her in her country home.

At the time when Navestock was released

from its strangling encumbrances there was no great thing that Mr. Denys could do, but with the power in his hands waiting to be used, he was able to prepare for future opportunities.

The first change of importance that he carried through was called a prodigious innovation. He granted to Mr. Gooden, a thorough farmer and a man of capital, a lease of his farm at a quit-rent for a term of years calculated to cover his own life and his children's lives, including with it a large area of waste land to be reduced to cultivation. The non-payment of rent was the only plea admitted for the eviction of the tenant.

On this principle Mr. Denys declared it to be his intention to act as other farms on the estate fell in. It was a revolutionary principle, said Sir John Herrick, and would immensely lower the power of the landed

gentry. Mr. Denys answered that perhaps the landed gentry had no right to be so strong as they were, and tenant-farmers of independent type would be a new power of sterling value in the country. Also he answered that, looking forward, he believed this or a similar form of tenure was what all of them would have to come to.

It was impossible for his neighbours to quarrel with Mr. Denys for doing what he liked with his own when what he did was oppressive to nobody. But that it was not like him, nor like any Denys of Cote before him, they said freely.

The second example that he gave of the application of his revolutionary principle was more startling than the first, but it was received with a general chorus of approbation. This was the granting of a lease in perpetuity of what was reckoned the

most desirable of the lesser farms on the Navestock property to John Robert Meade, who had spent three years qualifying himself under a noted agriculturist to farm it well. With his small patrimony and the legacy that he had from Sir Oliver Denys he had a sufficient capital. A poor young gentleman of ancient descent turned to the trade of a farmer for profit was an experiment watched with interest by many, and with every wish for its success. People who had gaped and wondered at the presentation of Arthur Meade to the living of Navestock, gaped and wondered again at his elder brother's fortune, and speculated much on what could be Mr. Denys' motive in benefiting these two young men. Probably Mr. Denys had no occult motive. He wanted a good clergyman for his parish, and good farmers on his land—and if the

brothers had not been valuable men in their respective ways, they would not have had his appointments.

That Navestock was not to be set up again in state and splendour was made known for a certainty when Mr. Gooden's new lease was granted. He began to build a farmstead on the high road to Beauminster; and as soon as Navestock was vacated, a little army of workmen appeared on the scene who began to pull the old house down. The antiquarians and archæologists raised an outcry as if the place were a shrine consecrated by holy memories, but its destruction was not stayed for that. The relics of Giles Denys were burnt in the bonfire which ancient custom kindled on Nave Hill the next Fifth of November; and when the walls were laid even with the ground, the foundations were dug out, and

the site was levelled, and so utterly obliterated that none could tell where the accursed place had stood. It was said of Ralph Denys that he went mad that day.

With the best of the cut stone and the oak timber was built a new house which was called by the name of New Place. The spot chosen for it was said by tradition to have been the original seat of the Meades. It was a beautiful site and a beautiful house, and the general expectation was that now Mr. and Mrs. Denys would remove from Cote, where the sound of the axe and the hammer was likely to be heard for the next generation. But they did not remove, nor make any sign of such a change. On the contrary, the new house was let to a stranger for seven years.

"Denys is putting his affairs in order as if he were going to die," Sir John Herrick

said to his old friends at Auldcaster. "We can none of us make him out. It has been the craze of his family to add field to field, and he is wanting to sell. I believe he wants to sell long leases of every rood of land that has been added to Navestock since it was stolen. He showed me the old *terrier* the other day—quite a curiosity it is. When he has reduced the estate to its ancient limits, what will he do with it? What will he do with it?"

That was a question sooner asked than answered. It did not actually appear that Mr. Denys had any deeper design than to diminish the burden of his possessions, and make what he kept easier of management —a design comprehensible enough to such persons as knew that he had appointed his wife guardian and trustee of his children—of all his children. Marie-Irene was now con-

stantly at the Manor House, playfellow in ordinary during her holidays to Hugh Oliver, himself a little master over everybody, not by domineering, but by the persuasive influence of a fine, affectionate nature. And Hugh Oliver had by this time another brother in the cradle, who was christened Wilfred.

Such and such was the background of life at Cote for several years to come—neither changed nor greatly varied, but as sunshine and cloud-shadow vary a landscape in passing over it. Though Mrs. Denys had said in her wrath that she should never care to see the House with Golden Gables any more, she saw it annually, and maintained her correspondence with Cricket and her mother unbroken. Yet none of them came from Auldcaster to Cote—Mr. Denys was now the one implacable. "I will never break bread with any of your house," he had vowed

to his wife, and when he had vowed he was not the man to repent.

Still there was never any lack of information at Auldcaster as to the course of events at Cote, whether public or domestic. Cote was gradually emerging from its seclusion. One day Lady Herrick arrived full of the good news that her dear Jenny's husband had got his famous plans adopted by Mr. Denys, and very liberally paid for.

"That is Delia's doing—we have Delia to thank for that," she said to the judge. "She *is* good—you don't know *how* good she is—and to everybody. It is enough to give poor Charlie a fresh lease of life, and my dear Jenny declares that it has renewed her youth. I wish you could see Cote before they begin to spoil it."

"To spoil it?" said Lady Daventry interrogatively.

"Yes. Every place is spoilt more or less when it begins to grow. There is Cambourne, where my sister Mary lives—the old people have added a clause to their litany, and pray: 'From the vulgar rich neighbour, good Lord, deliver us!' Mr. Midas can let nothing pass him. Go then, if you wish to see what to avoid."

Mr. Wilton's plans had it in view to make of Cote a town that should be beautiful in every part. The roads opened vistas where bright glimpses of the sea came in, soft curves of the down, wooded declivities, or blue lines of remoter distances. From the day when the decision was arrived at that the place must suffer development, Mrs. Denys had given her mind thoroughly to understand its wants and capabilities. Her husband appeared supine, but he let her do, and when any measure necessitated vigorous

action he was not found wanting. She observed what company resorted there—the selectest good company, whether English or foreign. It was not much in favour with the rich commercial and manufacturing interests, nor with the people who live to make a show; but it had entertained kings and queens under other names, and princes, high lords of Parliament, and men of mark under their own, with all such satellites as revolve in the spheres of rank and celebrity. These great folks had been content to lodge much more humbly than lesser folks have been since, and it was good judgment to take into first account the charms and pleasures that attracted them.

These were the tranquil beauty of the place, and its restful out-of-the-world seclusion. The bay was called lovely by travellers who had seen Naples. The beach

was excellent, the bathing and boating were very good. Great ships passed on the horizon, and yachts came in, but there was no fishing-fleet to watch, no need of pier or harbour, nor any natural probability of such want being created. The downs and fields were as much frequented as the sea-shore. The green walks were delightful, and there was one extensive tract of heath and woodland not too far off, which seemed like a garden of Eden in the summer weather. Old Crump laid it down for a law that these paths through the fields and the woods, which had been half the making of Cote so far as it was made yet, must never be stopped. He took the scenery altogether under his protection, and eager to be of service in the changing order of things, insisted that every house should have its rightful share of prospect, and no new-comer be

allowed to block out the pretty view of his neighbour of longer standing. He insisted too that every house should be "all face," a sightly object in itself, because the broken nature of the ground did not admit of regularity, and other people's walls and roofs and chimneys must come into everybody's picture more or less. Therefore the native stone which was cheap and abundant was the building material, roofs were variously tiled and the Sussex chimney was in vogue. High boundary walls were interdicted, and hedges of yew, holly, and privet preserved the rural character of the place.

When land rises of a sudden from thirty and forty shillings the acre to thirty and forty pounds, the lord of the manor may well afford to tax his unearned increment of wealth for the founding of solid roads to be dedicated to the public use; and this

Mr. Denys did, to his own and his tenants' permanent advantage. Wide roads they were, and well drained, with raised foot-paths good for winter exercise. Several of the industrious old inhabitants put their savings into bricks and mortar, and others rented houses in the reasonable expectation of being able to earn a living by letting lodgings. That Cote should be made comfortable enough to tempt the homeless people who live in lodgings all the year round was for these a necessity, and they were treated with scrupulous fairness. Their interest was in a manner everybody's interest; for the community never could be otherwise than limited, and must hang well together or fall in pieces.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHICH WILL WIN?

"No man's soul is alone: Laocoon or Tobit. The serpent has it by the heart, or the angel by the hand."—RUSKIN.

MR. DENYS' method of administering his property at Navestock was so contrary to the way of the world that the world found a great deal to say about it, but it appealed to high and generous sentiment, and it was made known to Delia by her mother that the judge entirely approved of what he had done there. Delia was glad, but she did not venture to tell her husband. He never read her home letters now, and had long ceased to care what the judge or any

of her people thought of his proceedings. His friends whom he preferred were of another sort, and Mr. and Mrs. Essex-Brough were still the first and chief of all. Few days passed that one or the other did not find the way to the Manor House. Mrs. Essex-Brough had from the beginning assumed the office of old family friend to Mr. Denys, and though Mrs. Denys did not resent the assumption openly, neither did she ever so far acquiesce in it as to cultivate that lady's society otherwise than in the most formal manner. To Mr. Denys her company and conversation were a vast resource, and his feeling for the appearance of it was probably blunted by custom; but his country neighbours did not fail to make a note of their constant association and to whisper their pity and indignation for his young wife.

Delia was happily not sensible of needing

either. She did not admire Mrs. Essex-Brough, and had ceased to believe in her great goodness of heart, but she was not afraid of her. They had come to an issue once, and Delia had exclaimed rather hotly on that occasion: "I wish you would not give Mr. Denys bad advice!" to which Mrs. Essex-Brough, laughing, had rejoined: "He is not obliged to take it." That was true. Mr. Denys was not obliged to take Mrs. Essex-Brough's advice, but she liked him to take it. She had conceived an idly mischievous ambition to predominate over his wife, and prevailed by affecting to see that Delia was a poor adviser in rural affairs, which had all her life engaged her own attention. Delia was quite awake to the nature of the rivalry that Mrs. Essex-Brough was busy to set up, and perhaps she was, at first, rather too indifferent to the risks of it. Mr. Denys'

passion for active sports and amusements was untiring, and Delia had never entered into them with the *verve* of the other lady, who had no lovely little troublesome boys to engage her attention. She would neither ride to the meet nor walk with the guns, which was Mrs. Essex-Brough's regular practice; and though Mr. Denys might very possibly have denied to his wife these rough privileges had she aspired to them, he was always willing to enhance their enjoyment by that other lady who was *not* his wife. Nevertheless her power had its limits; for Mr. Denys was not weak.

It was a fact evident to the whole county that the lord of the manors of Cote and Navestock must be growing richer now every year he lived, and it became a source of wonder to many that he did not raise his scale of expenditure, and assert his title to

that position of public usefulness from which he had been hitherto excluded. That Mrs. Denys wished for no change seemed a very poor reason and explanation to their neighbours at the Glen House, but in this important particular Mrs. Denys had her way. And she had her way in another thing which was also curiously observed as being at variance with her former views and inclinations. Though the little boys went with their mother everywhere else, they were always left at Cote when she accompanied her husband to Navestock. The common people said that the squire's lady began to stand in awe of the curse.

The steward who was in authority at Navestock at the date of Mr. Denys' marriage had lately died, and Mr. Quorn had taken his office. Mr. Denys was well served there now, and tenants' complaints and defaulting

tenants were rare. Navestock village was rebuilt, and to several of the better class of labourers were let on long leases single acres of land to break up for spade cultivation. Two or three of these built for themselves cottages on plans that Mr. Denys provided and strictly enforced, and planted fruit-trees in the full security that they and theirs would gather the crops. Still further to ameliorate the condition of the poor who live by the day's work, some of the smaller gentry were attracted to Navestock by the offer of parcels of building land on leases of nine hundred and ninety-nine years—the same form of lease as was granted at Cote, but at a lower price as the land was of lower value. This tenure was next to freehold, and, as Mr. Quorn drily remarked, could be converted into freehold with a stroke of the pen whenever the

cumbersome land-laws underwent that radical reform of a clean sweep which Mr. Denys was preparing for; and meanwhile the business of management simplified.

Mrs. Denys was neither seen nor heard by the world at large in respect to the revolution at Navestock, but Mr. Quorn knew that hers was the voice which first set it rolling. Whatever might have been her pride and desire of riches once, now all her mind was bent on saving her children, and all her ambition was involved in the well-doing of Cote. The Manor House was hospitable to strangers, some of whom re-visited Cote so often that they came to rank as friends, and spoke of it elsewhere as a charming resort which had an agreeable society and a good tone. Yet for all this Cote was not free of perils to its advancement. The water supply was

uncertain, some other arrangements were far from perfect, and those pestiferous cottages out of sight at the back of the inn were still there, and still overcrowded, a bane to the village, yet a "paying property" which no compulsory power on the spot was able to deal with.

Said the parish doctor to Old Crump: "You will have a bad day in Cote before very long if you don't make a regulation in that corner where the Moffatts herd. The fever which was such a plague nine years ago is about again."

Old Crump chaffered with his lips, and started in painful haste to scold the sluttish Mrs. Moffatt, who just jeered at him, and praised the fever as the best friend the poor had, because it thinned the big families of children. Crump bought her a new besom for sixpence to sweep the dirt from the door

under the drip of the eaves; but this sanitary tool, though it was useful, was not all that was needed, and it was all that she got.

This was in the early part of the year, when a cloud on the horizon of the summer made all hearts quake for the success of the season. To point to it, or mention it, unless with bated breath, was a high crime and misdemeanour against the common weal; for at Cote, as at more famous places, it was quite the moral thing to deny such danger to the public safety, until the mourners going about the streets told a true tale.

Mrs. Denys was constantly in the village doing or scheming good for somebody, but Moffatt's Corner was forbidden her. Mr. Denys had said, and Mr. Clarges had said, that she must not go there. The cases of want and disease were fitter for the parish relieving-officer than for beneficent ladies, and

even the stout and pious Miss Clarges submitted to the interdict.

Mr. Denys heard what threatened, was afraid, and said nothing at home. Perhaps no saying would have averted what afterwards befell, but that was not the reason why he kept the thing close from his wife. It was because Delia had urged repeatedly that what had been once might be again, if more and better cottages were not provided for the increasing population. Crump did not want more cottages for poor people at Cote, or perhaps he wanted no more poor people there. He was at variance with Mrs. Denys on some first principles, and the lady's way of enunciating contradictory opinions had lately given the agent deep offence. In his judgment she meddled with matters that she did not understand, and Mr. Denys himself had expressed a wish

that she would leave such and such tasks to other people. Once Delia had answered him with tears and passionate declamation. Since then it had become plain that if peace was to be preserved between his wife and his confidential old servant, Delia's propensity to set right with a strong hand what she considered wrong must be discouraged by the practice of a judicious reserve. And the concealment of the epidemic that menaced the village was an instance of it.

One afternoon in Easter Week Mrs. Denys was at Croft Cottage when a Scotch engineer, a former fellow-student with Mr. Wilton, dropped in, and an animated conversation ensued concerning the stream of civilisation that might be expected to flow into the fresh country opened up by the railway system which Mr. Matheson was then employed in

extending coast-wise. Mrs. Denys was extremely interested to hear the professional men's opinions, and rose to go long before she went. The remarks of a beautiful woman are impressive even when they have little intrinsic value, but Mrs. Denys talked excellent sense, and when she was gone, the Scotchman cried out with enthusiasm that she was meant to be a great woman surely—she had a quite masculine intelligence in affairs, and what a capital pedestrian she was: he had often met her as he was going up and down the line where his navvies were at work, always with one little boy, and sometimes with a second whom he had seen her carrying pick-a-back.

Mrs. Wilton, addressing her husband when Mr. Matheson left, said: "Your Scotch friend is vastly taken with Mrs. Denys' greatness. It is not so much her greatness that I admire as her pure goodness. I never cared for the

Bess of Hardwicke vein in her, but I do love to see her with her children. It is a blessing she has them to spend her affections upon, for she seems to have nobody else."

Mr. Wilton looked at his wife, and spoke with solemn remonstrance: "Jenny, is it necessary to laud Mrs. Denys at her husband's expense? Don't be a Mrs. Moth. They get on very well together, so far as I can see."

"They get on very well, going their separate ways, Charlie. And I am not a Mrs. Moth," Jenny as solemnly rejoined.

What Mrs. Wilton implied was overtrue. An unspoken defiance had arisen between Mr. Denys and his wife since the beginning of the winter. The requirement of the passing day for Delia was patience, and up to this time she had never lost it though her provocation was grave. She saw her husband resorting ever more and more to the Glen House, riding to

the meet two or three mornings in the week with Mr. and Mrs. Essex-Brough, or riding with the lady alone, and returning late in the day, tired and indisposed for other society. Delia made him no reproaches for real or imaginary neglect. She was not jealous, and did not affect to be jealous, but she was piqued, and grew proudly shy. They were not estranged at heart, but that "plague of a woman" had spoiled their pleasant sense of companionship. Delia had delighted once in a great walk with her husband, but now she was fain to take Hugh Oliver, and range the woods and fields, the downs and shore, with him; and they ranged often so far and wide in the lengthening days of spring that they became known by sight to strangers like Mr. Matheson, and talked of in the country.

Happily for herself, Mrs. Denys possessed that splendid health and glorious sense of

physical wellbeing from which good-humour is inseparable. She adored her liberty of roaming, though with only Hugh Oliver to share it. There were occasions when Mr. Denys would have felt it quite as agreeable to walk with his wife as to ride with his friends at the Glen House, but Delia did not seem to expect it.

Their elder son was a sociable little man, loving and merry, and his mother had always liked to have him there at breakfast-time, and had made him her messenger to papa at the other end of the table as soon as he could trot. None of these sweet dutifulnesses was she ever tempted to remit. The boy took a great deal upon him, seeing and knowing nothing else but kindness, and would lean up against his father's rough sleeve as confidingly as against his mother's heart, which was tender and soft for all children always.

Mr. Denys had ceased to inquire now how

Delia spent the long days when he was absent from morning till evening. She had her boys to amuse her, he supposed—he called the little boys *hers*, to distinguish them from John and George, who were only *his*. Delia did not carp at the expression—his heart was bound up in them even as hers was; that she knew for a surety, and she had probably not much doubt that he loved her as dearly.

Hugh Oliver was six years old and Wilfred was four. When Wilfred went on a walk with Hughie and their mother, Phœbe went too, and it was wonderful what a distance the little fellows would go without tiring, beguiled by their cheerful devices. But it chanced one day when they had started in the sunshine to climb the down that they were caught in a dense sea-fog. It was easy to become bewildered and to lose their way, and they lost it so far that when the

fog cleared off, though Mrs. Denys knew where they were, and knew the road home, it was a much longer road than she would have chosen. All was bright again, and with Cote church-spire for a guide, she thought it might be safe to walk by sight, straight as the crow flies, through fields arable and pasture, through woods, and over all impediments of gates, hurdles, and hedges that came in their way.

"I am afraid you will be very tired, dear mistress?" Phœbe said. Phœbe was a pony in red worsted harness, ambling gently in front of Hugh Oliver. Mrs. Denys was carrying the youngest boy pick-a-back, as the Scotch engineer had seen her.

Wilfred loved to be carried pick-a-back by his mother, and it was pretty to watch them making that procession, she in her vigorous young beauty, and the child with his little hands clasping her neck, his face warmly

flushed, his lips running over with inarticulate sweet babblings and laughter. Delia's strength went a mile or so without flagging, and might have gone another and another, and have brought them safe home, but as they were wending along a green ride through the woods under the down, she heard voices and the tramp of horses approaching. Her heart stood still, and her knees shook. There were several voices, of which the loudest and most resonant was her husband's. She turned to Phœbe, not speaking, but thinking—was there no other way? There was no other—they must go on. Phœbe held out her arms to take Wilfred down, but he declined to be taken down. Instead, he urged his mother to go faster.

Mr. Denys was in the company of Mr. Clarges and Mr. and Mrs. Essex-Brough. They were riding two and two, the rector being a little in advance. He half turned,

pointing forwards, and said: "Denys, look here;" and Mr. Denys, looking beyond him, saw Delia, and heard himself hailed with wondering delight by his little sons. Nor did Delia seem sorry. She steadied herself bravely, and coming up to him with her precious load, just said: "We lost our way in the fog on the down. Please, lift Willie in front of you, and help us home." Her eyes were clouded with fatigue, and she was distressed before these witnesses, but her action was simple and natural. If Mr. Denys felt ashamed and vexed, it was for himself and not with her.

Mrs. Essex-Brough began to ask hasty questions, and to devise more succour for the poor vagrants than the conveyance of Wilfred. Would not Mrs. Denys ride the rector's quiet cob? The rector was out of the saddle in an instant. Mrs. Denys hesitated, but her hus-

band caught at the suggestion. His young wife's countenance was a reproachful sight.

"Up with you, Delia. Willie can sit in your lap," he said encouragingly; and resigning his own horse to Mr. Clarges, he prepared to lead his gipsies home, while his friends, disconcerted by the meeting, rode on in constrained silence.

Phœbe, still driven by Hugh Oliver, trudged sturdily in the rear telling her master in reply to questions that they had gone farther on a day with the children than this. "How much farther?" Mr. Denys asked his wife, but Delia did not answer. She was gazing before her with an uneasy sensation of fear. If her husband forbade these wanderings, she knew that she must obey him, and she would miss them sadly. Willie chirped a little to them both, then folded round in his mother's arms, presently hushed and fell

asleep; and Hugh Oliver and Phœbe lagging behind, they had their explanation out.

"There are a great many hours in the day, and often they are very long," was Delia's reply to a tentative remark from her husband, and her voice sounded unsteady while trying to be firm.

Mr. Denys was taken aback, and at a loss for a rejoinder. He had no fault to find with the manner in which his wife did her social duties. She did them easily and gracefully; her household was quietly governed, and with conscientious observance of his general orders. She had a voice of control in the gardens, and everything at her disposal that she could reasonably require within and without her domain. She had numerous friends and acquaintances in the village, and in the country round numerous good neighbours. He told himself that she had all she needed, and all she ought to want, but he did not quite succeed

in bringing conviction home to his mind that she was without cause of dissatisfaction. In the absence of anything better to say, he said that he did not understand what she meant.

"My own people might be all dead for any comfort they are to me, and what are friends? I have no heart for friends!" Delia cried in a gust of passionate feeling. "I have never complained. I know that you love me, but how many days in the week do you spend at the Glen House, and leave me to go and come alone? She amuses you—that plague of a woman, but I don't like her. I like her less and less. She gives you bad advice. She is a bad influence. You know very well what I mean. She calls the poor people clods, and laughs at me because I care for them. I can't help caring for them. It hurts me to see them hurt. I want blessings for my children, not curses."

Mr. Denys knew perfectly what his wife meant when her voice broke with a sob, and she laid her lips on Willie's soft cheek to hide her tears. She was so little selfish, so little exacting, that he heard her with a degree of wonder, awakening slowly to the fact that her bill of indictment was a true bill against both himself and the lady. Prudently he did not attempt a defence in words, but just held out a hand of reconciliation, which Delia took with a long-drawn, tremulous sigh.

It was a lovely evening now, and Delia did not often come this way. They were pacing along a broad strip of grass open for a considerable distance by the roadside. The primroses were out in abundance, and the nut-bushes were full of soft tassels. Some fine ash-trees grew here. All the year round it was a beautiful spot, commanding beautiful and extensive views—a favourite picnic spot with

strangers. At the foot of the rise a bank was being formed to enclose it. The labourers had left off work, but their tools remained for the next day. Delia asked what was being done, though, indeed, it was plain enough what was being done. They were running up a fence to take possession of the bit of waste land.

"We shall make a shady hedgerow of it, and plant spruce to be ready to cut when Wilfred comes of age," Mr. Denys said.

"I thought it belonged to the poor people. Widow Blythe feeds her little black cow there," Delia murmured in sad dismay.

"Does she? Then she must find another pasture. Many things have been allowed that cannot go on."

"Hugh dear, don't do anything hard in the name of the children! Don't take the bit and sup of the poor to make our cup run over," Delia whispered, almost breath-

less in her pain. It had come at last, the thing that she had lived in secret terror of. Her husband made her no answer.

They were approaching a pretty thatched cottage in a garden of fruit-trees. This was the Orchard, where lived the Widow Blythe whose little black cow Mr. Denys had just sentenced to the forfeiture of its rights of common. She was at the gate as they drew near, and rather sharply cried out: "Mr. Denys, a word with you, sir, if you please," as if afraid to lose the opportunity.

"Another time, Mrs Blythe, another time," Mr. Denys said, and with an abrupt nod passed on.

Delia saw from the old woman's eagerness that she was in trouble, and perhaps angry; but Mr. Denys was looking down and looking very dark, and his wife never spoke when he put on that threatening countenance.

Just below the Orchard a gate opened from the main road to the bridle-path across the fields which Mrs. Essex-Brough had once advised Mr. Denys to close. It had been closed for a time, but it was open again now, and gave a short cut to the Manor House. Ten minutes more and they were under the limes—at home—and Willie woke up to laugh and chirp again. His father's visage cleared as he kissed the child, and set him on his feet; and to his wife he said only that she must not go a-gipsying with the children any more until he found them a good donkey. And then he left them, as it seemed to Delia, to avoid the questions and remonstrances that were quivering on her tongue.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE ORCHARD.

"We advise you to act in accordance with the real sentiments of both parties, and to make the best terms you can under the circumstances; for you know, and we know, that, in men's dealings with each other, abstract right is considered only when both stand on equal terms."—*Athenian Spokesman.*

Mrs. Denys' silence did not always signify submission to the understood wishes of her husband. She drew a line of her own where obedience ought to stop, and though she was able to infer from what she had seen that he wished her not to concern herself with the troubles of the Widow Blythe, she took her way to the Orchard the next morning purposely to learn what these troubles were.

Mrs. Blythe was a handsome old woman,

a North-country woman, straight and strong, and with her faculties unimpaired at threescore years and ten. She had lost her husband and all her children, but called herself blessed in two good grandsons—Richard, who was married and lived at home, and Jack, who was single and had lately got employment under Mr. Matheson, the engineer. Phœbe was their cousin, and had been brought up with them at the Orchard by her grandmother.

Mrs. Denys dropped in at the Orchard occasionally at the end of a walk. As the squire's lady she liked information on which she could rely as being true, and Mrs. Blythe had all the news of the parish and all its old-world tales at her fingers' ends. The widow was thankful now to have the lady's ear, and proceeded to detail her grievance.

She had received a notice from the steward to give up the Orchard at Michael-

mas — the Orchard and the house, which she had reckoned as good as her own, which she roundly asserted it was robbery to take away from her, alleging that there had been a promise, and Crump knew it, that the rent being paid, she should enjoy it in quiet possession as long as she lived.

When Mrs. Denys interceded for her, she began by asking her husband if this were so. Mr. Denys explained that long before Cote was his, the house had been built by David Blythe on a lease of the Orchard for three lives, the lives of his three sons, John, Thomas, and Oliver. Oliver Blythe, the old shepherd who had died since Christmas, was the last life in the lease; and the widow, who was John's widow, was actually being used with more than common consideration in having six months' grace given her, and the gathering of the next season's fruit-crops.

As for the promise she alleged, Mr. Denys said that if Crump had ever made such a promise he went beyond his authority, and the widow must not be encouraged in her expectation that the notice would be withdrawn.

As Mrs. Denys had ventured to hold out comfortable hopes to Mrs. Blythe, it was her unthankful duty to go again to the Orchard, and prepare her for what impended. The disappointment was very bitter. For a minute or two the old woman did not speak—could not trust herself to speak. She let her eyes travel slowly round the house-place, a picture of thrift and orderliness. The deep window-sill was crowded with plants in flower, but light enough came in at the open door which gave a view down a turfed walk between two rows of espaliers. Along the edge of the border were set gillyflowers, red, white, and purple, most gay and fragrant in the sun.

Mrs. Denys waited when her communication was made, and seeing the widow at a loss what to reply, she said gently: "You have always been industrious, Mrs. Blythe; surely you have saved some money in the bank?"

"What is a few pounds to set against the Orchard? The Orchard's been our bank. All our spare labour we put into that," the widow said, recovering herself with a resolute effort more touching than any weakness. "When John and me came to live here, the land was as bare as the back of my hand, and the house fit to fall down. John's father built this homestead, and the fruit-trees John planted, by twos and threes as we could pay for them, and always good sorts. John was very particular to have 'em good sorts; for what was the profit o' cumbering the ground with crabs and sloes? He loved his trees, John did, and

was downright happy tending 'em—one might ha' thought the growing things felt it, they prospered so. When he died he left me my two lads—Thomas and George. George left me Richard and Jack, and Thomas left me Phœbe, and their mothers both gone. Why it was I couldn't think, but so it was; and I found bread for 'em, and thanked God that gave me health and strength to do it. And now it's come to me turning out in my old age."

Mrs. Denys was glad to be sitting in the shadow, for her pity was deeply stirred. She had been able to get at no good reason why the Blythes must quit the Orchard, where the family had lived for generations before the David arose who built the homestead. Nobody else wanted the place, which was rather lonely, and the widow and Richard would have been only too grateful to renew the lease at a

higher rent, or to stay as yearly tenants had that been possible.

"Where we are to go the Lord knows," Mrs. Blythe went on after a painful pause. "Cottages are scarce at Cote for labouring men, and Richard's sore set agen leaving the farm where he has worked ever sin' he were a little chap going along with his father. He's shepherd now that his uncle Oliver's dead—'promotion,' he calls it. 'A hard place,' poor Mary says, but it suits him, and the wage is more. He has one bairn and another coming, and that's a consideration."

"Your other son was fond of the sea, Mrs. Blythe?"

"Yes, Thomas—Phœbe's father. He went knocking about the world on board ship until we lost sight of him altogether. We never knew what came of Thomas. He could not bide quiet at home, and Jack's

like him—a bonny lad i' the face, and Mr. Matheson says he's got a streak o' genius, which signifies, they tell me, cleverness above the common sort. Richard thinks he'll find a living more to his liking among the railway folk than here, and I wish he may. Now, Richard don't hanker after change. Mary and him's peaceable, and would ask no better than to stay on here for a lifetime, as I've stayed. To think it's going to end, and me to die under a strange roof!"

"You will keep together, Mrs. Blythe—Richard will take care of you?"

"No fear but he'll take care of me. Richard's always been good to his grandmother, and so has Mary, poor lass. And her trouble's heavy, falling just now—but I've promised not to fret."

The old woman got up from her seat, and walked to the open door, rallying her cour-

age and fortitude with a renewed effort. Then she walked back to the fireside. Mrs. Denys had risen too, and was on the point to depart, when the gate clicked, and with slow shuffling feet Crump toiled to the door. He waited outside until the squire's lady stepped forth, and made wide way for her as she drew her dress close and passed him with a stiff bow and a glance of pitiless repugnance. While Mrs. Blythe attended her to the gate, the agent stood gazing about at the trees in blossom, a lovely sight, muttering and chaffering with his great lips as his habit was when disturbed or angry.

The instant the widow came back within earshot Crump sharply demanded: "What message did the lady bring you?"

"None at all, sir. We have to go, as you know very well," was the short answer.

"Mr. Denys ain't the man to repent, I know that, Mrs. Blythe. He'll be lord and master on his own land—that's no new story."

"Who hinders him? I never said a word good nor bad."

"You should have kept that gate locked when I told you." Crump's nod as he said this was full of meaning.

"Is that why the squire is putting us out of the Orchard?" Mrs. Blythe asked, gravely reflective on a sudden.

"Nothing's done without a reason—reason enough when it's shown."

"Richard wouldn't have the gate kept locked, sir."

"And Richard said he wasn't afraid of consequences. He did not know what he was talking about. He knows now."

"Richard said he'd do what was fair, and let what would come of it, come. It was

not for him to deny the right of way that had used it all his life. 'Tell truth, and shame the devil,' that was my lesson to the lads, and you're witness against yourself, sir, and the squire's witness, that Richard's done and said nothing but the truth."

Crump hobbled off again without rejoinder, and the widow was left to chew the cud of meditation alone. She had been abundantly warned that they were putting themselves in peril by refusing the obedience that the squire exacted. The rector had brought her a timely word: "Mr. Denys says it will cost him something to keep the gate shut, but it shall cost you a great deal more to open it;" and she had answered him with a text: "The rich man hath done wrong, and yet he threateneth withal: the poor is wronged, and he must entreat also;" at which the clergyman was not pleased. Then her

brother-in-law, Oliver, the old shepherd, had spoken, telling her that nobody in his experience had ever of set purpose crossed the squire, and gone long unpunished. "Thou's stubborn in thy pride of right-doing, and he's just as stubborn in his pride of playing master. We've got to behave ourselves lowly and reverently to squires and parsons in this country, Hannah; for squires and parsons clan together, and is stronger than we. If thou will have thy way, thou and Richard, thou'll have to pay for it. When the day o' reckoning comes, remember my words." Mrs. Blythe remembered them now, but with no backward glance of regret. That stubborn pride of right-doing in which she was bred, and in which she had bred her lads, was likely to be a strong holdfast to her in the trial that was approaching.

This was on a Saturday while Mary was gone to market. In the evening Jack

arrived at the Orchard to spend Sunday. When they were all shut in together, resting after their week's work, Mrs. Blythe told her grandsons and Mary what visitors she had had, and what had passed. Then she put a question to Richard.

"Does thou think, Richard, that the squire's taking the old place from us because thou refused to lock that gate, and stood to it that there'd been a right o' way through these fields as far back as thy memory went, and thy uncle Oliver's, and his father's before him?"

"I think nought about it, grandmother. I'd rather not think worse of the squire than I can help," Richard answered. "I've been talking it over with Lawyer Quorn this afternoon up at the farm, and he says Mr. Denys is well within the four corners of the law. Then says I, it's no use more words. What the law

will back the squire through, he'll never stick at for being told it's hard measure. As for the right o' way, I'm thankful not to ha' been tempted. There's no saying but I might ha' considered to hold my tongue."

"I wish thou had, Richard, and left bigger folk to fight for it," his wife said in a crying, plaintive voice.

The widow only gazed at her feelingly, but Richard said: "Nay, Mary, not so, not so. Keep a good heart, my lass."

Jack, who had been sitting in deep thought, sprang up with a passionate gesture and a mutter between his teeth: "I wonder now how many men in his time Denys will make a little less than honest!"

"Thou may wonder, lad! They're not counted yet," said his grandmother. "But this be sure of—they're lightly dipped, not grained in honesty, that Denys can spoil the dye of."

"You are talking out of one of them old books you brought from the North, grandmother—there it is on the shelf."

"Likely enough, Jack, what folks read that's worth remembering gets wrought into the texture o' their minds. I'll make thee heir to it. You'll recollect, Richard and Mary, when I'm gone, Jack gets that book. There's things in it that will stand for true as long as the world stands—like the Bible itself."

Richard spoke again. "I told Mr. Quorn that the parson was against us, and sided with the squire. '*What did you expect?*' says he, showing his teeth, and glinting at me as sharp as a hawk. '*What did you expect?*' he says, and not a word more. He's what they call a man o' the world, yon. They are awfu' clever folk up in London. It hadn't occurred to me. I'd thought very different o' the parson."

CHAPTER XXX.

CROSS LIGHTS.

"The constant habit of well-doing is not gotten without the custom of doing well; neither can virtue be made perfect but by the manifold works of virtue often practised."—HOOKER.

MISS NANCY CLARGES was a woman who would have gone to the stake for her convictions. She was incredulous of the first news that Mrs. Blythe had got notice to quit the Orchard, and when she was driven into the belief that it was true, she went straight to her brother, and begged him to speak to Mr. Denys on the widow's behalf.

"It is not my place to speak to Mr. Denys. He knows his own business best, Nancy," was the rector's quiet reply.

"It is always a clergyman's place to speak,

Henry, when the poor are oppressed, and the helpless hardly used."

"I should only give offence. We must leave it in higher hands."

Miss Nancy felt vexed, and burst out in elder-sisterly remonstrance: "That is what you always say when you want to escape a disagreeable duty, Henry. I wish you would not be so afraid of giving offence."

"Mrs. Blythe has no right to complain, Nancy. She has angered and defied Mr. Denys more than once — recollect her behaviour about the way through the fields, and what Richard said and did. I carried her a word myself, to let her know what she might expect if she persisted. Mr. Denys said it would cost him something to keep the gates shut, but it should cost her a great deal more to open them. Well, it is going to cost her the Orchard."

"And you carried her that message, Henry? You ought to be ashamed to tell it! If you had had your wits about you, you would have bidden Mr. Denys, if he wanted such a message carrying, carry it himself. I would, in a minute!"

The rector coloured and veiled his eyes, sensible of his error, but willing to extenuate it by pleading that his sister knew as well as he did how the strong exact all they can, and the weak have to give way; but Miss Nancy, instead of being mollified, waxed more eloquently indignant.

"That is just your heathen philosophy, Henry. Christ's was a very different teaching. *He* would not have gone with a threat to a poor old woman from her landlord. It ought to have been easier for you to persuade him to drop the contention. Mr. Denys knew he was wrong, and you knew he was wrong;

Oliver Blythe told you so, and Old Crump did not dare contradict him. So this is why she shuts her mouth like a clasp when I try to talk to her? How long is it since we have seen her in her place at church or at the Lord's Table? And she used to be so regular! Oh, Henry, I am sorry. The good never comes that evil is done to bring about, but harm that we never dreamed of comes sure enough!"

Miss Nancy went away in tears, and her brother, stirred out of his gentle apathy, sought an interview with Crump.

Between Crump and the rector there was no love lost. Crump hated all sorts of sentimentalism, and especially pious sentimentalism. The rector occasionally reminded him in a pathetic, perfunctory voice that he had a soul, that he was getting into years, that he must die, that all men must die, turning on him, meanwhile, a benign, round, happy face, with

eyes half closed, and shaded further by one nervous hand. Crump never answered him a word. Early in their acquaintance they had got wrong. Crump had offered to the clergyman's perusal a letter from Mr. Denys in which he was bidden, in the name of his duty as a servant, to deny the superabundance of the ground-game concerning which the tenants on the glebe had complained. Crump was not equal to the strenuous effort of blindness required from him, and incurred his master's rebuke by following the dictates of higher law, confessing that the rabbits were too many, and ordering their decimation. The rector was capable of reasoning the thing out, and laying the blame where the blame was due; but he either did not do it or speedily forgot it; for he continued to rate the agent as a hardened offender who did his master's dirty work because he liked it.

Long since Crump had decided that the parson was as bad as himself without his temptation, and the vulgar opinion went with him, that the parson did side too much with the squire, that he was too ready to comply with prevailing occasions.

The affair of the Orchard brought that opinion to a head. The Widow Blythe made no secret of the loud words the clergyman had reported to her from Mr. Denys, and with inconsiderate haste he had said elsewhere that what had befallen the woman was through her own fault. "How dar' he say it was her fault? She did nothing but right. Denys knows no better; but parson does know better, and it is sin and shame to him to have gone on Denys' bad errand." Such was the rude commentary of Mrs. Blythe's neighbours upon the incident, and Miss Nancy, without meaning it, came to her brother as the mouthpiece of public senti-

ment, pointing with her simple rebuke where his "heathen philosophy" had made him unfaithful to his holy orders.

Old Crump was as plain as Miss Nancy: "You might have spoke a better word in season than you did, sir, but you're not in the habit of it. If you are repenting, it is to Mr. Denys you should go. I am not master."

Mr. Clarges felt extremely uneasy. He thought he would go to Mr. Denys; but first he would go and talk to his wife.

The eldest Miss Britton, Mrs. Clarges, was an amiable woman with limited views of life, who counted it her first duty to make her own husband comfortable. Before he had half stated his case, she interrupted him with impetuous, affectionate assurances that he had done all that he was bound to do. It was a clergyman's duty to live peaceably with all men, and it would be most annoying to have a

coolness grow up between the Manor House and the parsonage. Mrs. Blythe was a proud, stiff-necked old woman, a Dissenter at heart if ever there was one, and according to what Mr. Quorn said, without any legal cause of complaint against Mr. Denys.

"Be advised, dear Henry. Keep quiet. Don't let people stir up bad feeling," urged the lady with tender inconsequence.

The clergyman was much consoled, and probably he was advised, and did keep quiet; or if he spoke to Mr. Denys again of the widow's grievance, it was so privately that nobody ever heard of it. But nevertheless the annoying coolness that Mrs. Clarges deprecated made itself presently felt between the Manor House and the parsonage. Miss Nancy believed that if her dear Henry had had the sincerity and courage to withstand Mr. Denys in the first instance, Mr. Denys might have been deterred

from his harsh resolve to put the Blythes out of the Orchard. His compliance had deprived him of the right to interfere since, and with the burden of his weakness on her conscience, she went and confessed it all to Mrs. Denys. Mrs. Denys heard her to the end in silence, scared and white in the face as if some sudden, strong pain had laid its clutch upon her heart. There was a real, physical agony in her distress, and when she was able to speak, her voice was thin and vibrating, so unlike her usual voice that Miss Nancy was frightened.

"It was a pity, it was a sad pity—a cruel sad pity," she repeated over and over, dragging her words as if in weariness. "What is the use of preaching Christ on Sunday, and playing devil's advocate the rest of the week?"

Miss Nancy clasped her hands, and let the tears roll down her cheeks: "I cannot think how Henry could do it; for he prefers to be

kind. I wonder if Mr. Denys would listen to *me?*"

Mrs. Denys shook her head, with a wan smile saying: "He will not listen even to *me*."

But Miss Nancy did not relinquish her object, and Mr. Denys being unapproachable, she laid siege to Crump. Crump's initiatory denial took no effect on her purpose, and Mrs. Denys saw, before she went to town, how Mrs. Blythe's hopes were being kept alive by her promises, and heard when in town through Phœbe how perseveringly that lay sister of mercy toiled in her endeavours to keep them. From the rector she heard nothing. When she took her leave of him he made a tentative, self-conscious allusion to the affair of the Orchard, to which she made no reply.

"Perhaps you have been in communication with my sister Nancy about it?" Mr. Clarges said, still hesitating.

"Yes, I have been in communication with Miss Nancy," Mrs. Denys answered. And that was all.

The rector remarked to his bosom counsellor how difficult it was to speak to a person who was not in sympathy with you; which platitude was the first chill breath of that coolness between the Manor House and the parsonage which the poor lady had been so wishful to avoid.

LIBRARY

CHAPTER XXXI.

COUNSEL—GOOD AND EVIL.

"Each one his talent hath, to use at his device."
GEORGE TUBERVILLE.

THE interest that Mr. and Mrs. Denys had taken in Navestock since its redemption was rather that of diligent trustees than of owners, and Mr. Quorn's stewardship there was a post of large and honourable responsibilities. Early in this year Mr. Denys had invited him to accept a similar post at Cote, and he had consented, looking forward to those noble opportunities of usefulness which rising places create. But a brief tenure of his office was enough. He was a busy man of high character and standing in his profession, and

his duties at Cote brought him into collision with men of a very different sort, who treated with a cynical disregard some questions that seemed to him of primary importance. He did not like Old Crump, and he did not like Mr. Wilton much either. He found Mr. Wilton sadly backward in scientific knowledge, and prepared to let Mr. Denys build into the very foundations of his new town as many exploded errors as he pleased, quite unmindful of the sorrows of a future generation of ratepayers when condemned by a paternal government to dig them out. He was just in time to rescue Cote from the miserable blunder of pouring its sewage into the sea, but he did not succeed in opening the eyes of the prejudiced to the fact that if Cote thirsted for water in the dog-days, that was because Cote was too pennywise to provide a reservoir to utilise the water

that ran to waste down the cleft when the springs were full. Crump and Mr. Wilton swore by one another—needy, poor fellows both, united against the common danger of being pushed from their places. Mr. Quorn acknowledged Crump's wisdom in garnishing spare corners with trees and clothing bare walls with ivy, which Mr. Wilton pointed out with elaborate praises, and he acknowledged the grace of Mr. Wilton's notions about bringing the landscape into the roads, which Crump lauded as if the beauty were of his making; but Mr. Quorn had a passion for thoroughness in things not seen, and both Crump and Mr. Wilton were rather for making cheap compromises with picturesque dirt and disorder than for clearing them away. Mr. Quorn was sure that Mr. Wilton, as an engineer, would prove a costly failure, and that as an overlooker of other men's labour

it was time Old Crump was removed; but Mr. Denys did not think so, who liked no discharge but death, and had paid a smart price for Mr. Wilton's plans.

To Mrs. Denys' infinite regret and chagrin, Mr. Quorn made it known while they were in London that he must decline the stewardship of Cote. Mrs. Denys had counted on him to reverse some bad measures before they ran beyond retrieval, and her disappointment was acute.

"Why? Tell me why, Mr. Quorn. I am sure you have a good reason," she said. "Or tell Mr. Denys. It may be well that he should know."

Mr. Quorn replied that Mr. Denys did know, but could not enter into his views cordially enough to persuade him to alter his decision. To the lady at that time he avoided saying more, but to Mr. Wilton he

said bluntly that he could not afford to take professional charge of a place that was likely to bring discredit on him. Mrs. Denys was aware that he regarded the eviction of the Blythes—the very backbone of their peasantry—as a mistake of a cruel sort; and that he had refused to wink at the removal of their poor neighbours' landmark on the waste under the down, where he had ordered Crump to see taken away a warning to trespassers in search of nuts. Her hopes of a fairer rule were at an end, and to her husband she said that she was very sorry.

Mr. Denys was probably sorry too. He was certainly inconvenienced, but he could not dispose himself yet to take advice that was not agreeable to his inclination. He had been accustomed to a steward at Cote who confined himself to a strictly professional view of his employer's business—the sort of

legal adviser who would not presume to contradict a gentleman if, in a case of a disputed right of way to church, he chose to stud one of his gates with jagged nails, and to tar another afresh on a Sunday morning.

Mr. Denys had used this man without trusting him, but some of his neighbours were less wary, and he lapsed one day into an error for which Mr. Denys cried out that he deserved to be struck off the rolls. The breach of professional etiquette was gross and dangerous. The steward vapoured, and discarded his master. Mr. Denys turned on his heel, and sought a new man—who was not found yet, when he left town with his wife at the end of the season.

It was near the middle of July when Mr. and Mrs. Denys went down to Cote, intending to spend a few weeks there, and then

to go to Scotland. But for the shadow at the Orchard those weeks would have been a very happy time to Mrs. Denys; and not to fail for want of importunity, she spoke to her husband again of that affair, asking him if the notice to quit that had been served on Mrs. Blythe was absolutely irrevocable. He said in a hard tone that he had no intention of revoking it; his decision had been final from the first. Delia's eyes filled with hot tears. She longed to entreat for the old woman, but she was afraid.

One evening early in the previous May, when little Marie-Irene was at the Manor House, Mrs. Denys had taken her, and gone up the fields to the Orchard to say a word of kindness and good-bye before their departure to London. Marie-Irene was in great spirits, eager as the birds to sing, not awakened yet to any sorrow in

the world, but with eyes wide open to its beauty. It was a most lovely evening, and the oaks that year were rich in flower which hung like golden fringes in the declining sun. The child took great notice of the splendid show which she had never seen before; indeed it was rare to Mrs. Denys, who asked Mary if it was a common show up there. Mary could hardly tell; but Mrs. Blythe said she had not often observed it—the seasons brought something new and strange as often as they came round. The glow faded even as they watched it, but it left a solemn reflection on Marie-Irene's fancy, and she went home and made a parable of it, which she told to her father, to his great wonder and admiration. But it would have been surprising, he said, if she had not had a gift of poetry.

Marie-Irene's first requirement when she

came to Cote for her summer holiday was to go up to the Orchard again for the sake of the golden fringes.

"But they are gone," said Phœbe. "That was in blossom time—it is near the time of acorns now."

However, Marie-Irene willed to go, and Phœbe took her one afternoon with the little boys, and let them loose to play amongst the fruit-trees, while she listened and talked to her grandmother and Mary. She had not seen them yet since she came back from London, and had much to hear—how Jack was going quite out of the country with the railway folks—going to Spain; and how Richard had inquired of Crump if there was a chance that he might get leave to put up a cottage of his own if he could borrow the money, and how Crump had shaken his head, and told him he feared there was none.

"I'm coming to the belief that the squire wants to drive us away from Cote," the widow added. "But Richard won't give up the place where he was born if he can any ways help it. Miss Clarges is trying what she can do for us, but I don't expect it is much she can do. Parson's cottages is all occupied. There's a house to let at Moffatt's Corner."

"I'd a deal rather move to Cambourne than go to Moffatt's Corner," Mary said with a sort of vexed dejection. "I think it's the dreariest spot on the face of the earth, is Moffatt's Corner. I'd a deal rather pine than want fresh air. Bad air is what I never could abide. And the bairns will fall sick and die, I know they will."

"Other folk's bairns make shift to live there, Mary—and don't talk of pining. Richard can't give up his good place, and winter coming on; if he did, we might pine,

indeed." The old woman spoke with encouraging remonstrance. Her burden was heavy too, but her back was broader to bear it.

Phœbe looked at them both, and looked round the familiar house-place until she could not keep from crying. The children had come running in; Marie-Irene saw their grief, and with a sweet gentleness enticed the little boys away again.

Mrs. Blythe gazed after them down the green path. "She has a soft, loving eye, like her mother, that pretty little girl," she said, and in her voice there was a tone of sorry remembrance.

Phœbe spoke: "Do you recollect, grandmother, once calling me back when I ran to open the gate for that poor lady? The squire was behind, and heard it. I can see his face now. I don't believe he has ever forgotten."

Mrs. Blythe knew that he had never for-

gotten. She had never forgotten either, and lately the thought had run much in her mind that because she had shown no pity to that misfortune, so no pity would be shown to her. And after this evening, when Phœbe put her secret thought into words, there was a marked change in her behaviour. She kept silence on her grievance, and railed no more against Mr. Denys or Old Crump, but set her strength towards lightening their unavoidable calamity, and saving Mary who shrank from it with timid foreboding.

"It is the justice of God to *me*—it is nothing else but the justice of God to me," the old woman confessed to herself with rigorous, puritan sincerity; and one dark day, when Miss Nancy Clarges had toiled up the hill with a report of her hopeless task, she confessed the same to her, bidding her cease troubling: "For my downcome has to be," she said.

Miss Nancy carried the poor widow's touching confession to Mrs. Denys, and went on to improve the occasion in her perplexed theological way: "I was glad to hear her say that in God's sight she is guilty, and has earned the reverse she must suffer. She was unmerciful in her heart to that sinning woman, and now her unmercifulness is brought home to her after all these years. Her trial will be hard to endure; for she has a proud spirit. But God knows best what His frail creatures need to fit them for His blessed presence. Henry always says so. She has not been what we could wish, poor thing, since this adversity began — too sadly wanting in humility and submission." Here Miss Nancy paused with a face of sorrow, then, as in correction of herself, continued: "I don't mean that to put her out of the

Orchard is *right* or *kind*, or what we would like to do ourselves; but God is pleased to use means and instruments."

Mrs. Denys was always impatient of Miss Nancy's pious vein, and her manner was petrifying as she interrupted: "My husband is the instrument of this action which is not *right* or *kind*, and which you would not like to do yourselves. You seem to lose sight of his part in the execution of God's justice."

Miss Nancy was grievously dismayed, and confusedly penitent, but she had faith in her belief, and though she was sorry to have offended, she could not unsay her words. She rather inconsequently bade Mrs. Denys try and soften her husband's heart, and then got away from her on the plea of an engagement to be kept at the schools.

In her retreat Miss Nancy must have met Mr. Denys coming towards the Manor

House, for the sound of her voice was still in Delia's ears when he entered the drawing-room. Delia's face showed signs of disturbance which her husband knew perfectly, and he wanted to know what the disturbance was. She told him.

"Miss Clarges has been here again about the Blythes, Hugh. They can find no place to go into when they leave the Orchard except that empty house at Moffatt's Corner." Mr. Denys looked serious, but he offered no remark. Delia was silent for a minute; then with a beating heart she laid her hand upon his arm, and said with one of those pretty affectations that became her in excited moods: "Let not my lord be angry if I speak to him yet this once — Be pitiful, Hugh. Forgive that poor soul her want of charity. You know what I mean?"

Mr. Denys flushed, and his countenance

fell. "Yes; I know what you mean," he said slowly. "But, perhaps, you do not see all my motives. I have had enough of the Blythes. They have become troublesome people on the estate."

"Hugh dear, in what have they been troublesome? They were in their right in resisting your attempt to stop that road, were they not?"

"Yes; but a gentleman does not like to be defied and defeated by his own cottagers. It is a bad example—a mischievous example."

Delia's pulses were beating more evenly now. "I think the bad example was set higher up. I have no notion of squires and gentlemen standing on their power to do wrong as if it were a right—making 'their strength the law of justice,' as the Bible calls it."

Mr. Denys was not in the disposition to be moved, and it was very inopportune

for Delia's cause that Mr. and Mrs. Essex-Brough sauntered in just then, overhearing her last words. Mr. Denys was challenged to explain them, and did.

Mrs. Essex-Brough laughed: "Have you not agreed on that old affair yet? Surely it is not worth quarrelling about so often," said she, with an air of being tired of it. "Let the Blythes go, and have done with them. I should never think twice about such people."

"If you give way, Denys, you will soon have as many masters at Cote as they have at Cambourne," Mr. Essex-Brough exclaimed with peremptory scorn. "You may know how many factions there are at Cambourne by the testimonials always flying about the place. It has come to this, that poor Midas' life is a constant worry. He has let himself be cajoled here and driven there until, at last, with old Boreas on the local board, he is reduced to a nonentity."

"I will not tempt the fate of Mr. Midas," Mr. Denys said drily. "When I have said a thing I stick to it. My word is my word, though it turn to my own hindrance. And I am neither to be cajoled nor driven." As Mr. Denys spoke he looked up at his wife, and met her eyes, sad with the sadness of an extinguished hope.

Mrs. Essex-Brough sat by with a smile on her face — an unpleasant smile of triumph. Delia saw it, was angry, and gathering up her strength for a last effort, said with distinct, incisive utterance: "Mr. Midas is a landlord to take out an injunction against, and you, Mr. Essex-Brough, have helped him to his worst humiliations. The place is, indeed, very unfortunate that has him for its head, and if Hugh takes your advice it will not promote peace for us; it will ensure discord and distrust—the same feelings that are at the root

of the premature decay of Cambourne. There is no law against the eviction of the Blythes, but it is obviously unnecessary and unwise, and the motives from which it is done make it an ignoble action."

When Delia had spoken she walked towards the door. Mr. Denys with a quick step was before her, and opened it. She did not trust herself to lift her eyes, and as he shut her out, Mr. Essex-Brough said with his intelligent sneer: "Your wife fires great guns, Denys."

"My wife speaks the honest truth," Mr. Denys answered; and his friends made no further remarks on his wife.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A GARDEN SCENE.

"The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem
For that sweet odour which doth in it live."

SHAKSPEARE.

MR. QUORN'S refusal of the stewardship of Cote had not been without its instructive effect on Mr. Denys. He had no wish to emulate the misfortunes and unpopularity of his neighbour at Cambourne, or to lay burdens on his lessees for no purpose; and, at the rector's suggestion, he invited Mr. Matheson to investigate Mr. Wilton's plans and revise them. This gentleman undertook to supplement Mr. Wilton's plans by way of suggestion, but declined to supersede him. That the water-supply was the chief difficulty to be overcome, Mr.

Denys knew, and he consented to a scheme by which the whole first expense must devolve on himself. He was assured, that liberality would pay in the result.

"When a man gets the opportunity of building a town, he must work for all time," said the engineer. "Cote is clear ground yet. No mistake has been made of sufficient importance to injure its character. But mark this, Mr. Denys—your land will bear a population of three thousand without crowding; bring four thousand upon it, and they will not have elbow-room, and will suffer a dearth of water in the summer. The ball is at your foot now: you may make a beautiful, rural town of it, a joy for ever, or you may copy Cambourne, where man has done his mean and miserable best to make the gifts of nature of none effect."

Mr. Denys was moved by the enthusiasm of his fresh adviser, and introduced him to

Delia. There was one incident of Mr. Wilton's plans that Mrs. Denys had always objected to —the main street for shops, which was made to follow the narrow, sinuous course of the old high road. Mr. Matheson called it *bad*, and agreed with her that an open square in the centre of the town would be very much pleasanter; and as it was not essential to economise space, to economise space to the sacrifice of pleasantness would be a gratuitous blunder.

The idea of a square—a green square—at Cote was not an original idea, but one derived from some old Continental city that Mrs. Denys had seen, where the houses stood about a spacious area, and ancient trees stood for shade where trees grew before ever the houses were built. The great field in the midst of the village next the thatched inn was the site that she wished to see appropriated. It possessed an isolated elm-tree of perfect

growth, and on the high side of it, looking east, a double row of young lime-trees that might have been set there for the purpose. Moffatt's Corner would have to be done away whenever this idea was carried out: and a very good thing too, said everybody but Crump and a few other persons, his contemporaries in moral development, of whom Mr. Denys was one until Mr. Matheson's counsels urged him a pace or two onwards.

Mr. Denys went to Scotland in a heavy humour. He was probably dissatisfied with himself about the Orchard, but he gave no sign of a change of mind, nor did Delia seem to expect any now.

The little boys were left at Cote in charge of Mrs. Brice, their mother very reluctantly allowing herself to be separated from them, but John Denys, who also remained behind at the Manor House, promised to send a letter every

day. The letters came—joint contributions, of which Hugh Oliver's round hand and Willie's hieroglyphics were not the least interesting lines.

"John is very good to his little brothers," Delia said tenderly, perusing between tears and laughter these precious documents.

"You have bound him to be good to them. He would be no son of mine if he were not good to them," Mr. Denys answered, looking at her as if there was a word he wanted to say, if only he knew how.

It was to ask her to send for the children, and stay in Scotland till the removal of the Blythes was effected. But Delia enjoyed Cote in the season, and considered it part of their duty to keep open house when the village was full of visitors. Three weeks with the grouse was enough for her; but on one pretext or another, and without rendering his real reason,

Mr. Denys succeeded in keeping her away from home until the event she had so earnestly deprecated was over. Phœbe let her know—Phœbe had shrewdly guessed why the master delayed to go south; and perhaps her mistress was not cheated either, but she said nothing. Now and always it was her wisdom not to magnify the evil that she had failed to hinder, but to get any good out of it that it could be made to yield.

They returned to the Manor House at the end of September, and George Denys and Marie-Irene came the next day to meet them there. That had been a beautiful September, and Cote was still full to overflowing. The people had had a very good season, and were in good spirits. The church would not contain the congregation, and the rector began to tell his patron that a new church was a necessity. Mr. Matheson was in the place, and under his

correction Mr. Wilton was elaborating some plans of Mrs. Denys' Green Square which had seized on his imagination so vividly that he forgot to be jealous of her rival invention, and doted on the idea as if he had conceived it.

On the high side of the field looking east to the sea, four acres of uneven ground beyond the lime-trees were set apart for the new church and graveyard. Looking towards the sunset, there was a far and wide prospect over the inland country, very sweet and peaceful.

"If you bring a townful of inhabitants to live here, you must surely give them a place to be buried in, and round the church is the fittest place for a little town such as Cote will be," was Delia's unhesitating opinion; and Mr. Denys did not gainsay her.

The north side of the square was assigned to stalls where things good for food were to be bought, and the south side to shops

that sold things pleasant to the eye, and on either side central spaces were reserved as sites for public buildings. The fourth side was to be planted with Mrs. Denys' favourite lime-trees, and left open for the view down a broad road to the sea, which was the motive and life of the place, and for glimpses of the picturesque houses and gardens gathering fast on the heights north and south of the Cleft.

"Your wife has very magnificent notions, Denys," Sir Thomas Britton remarked when the sketch-plan was shown him.

"Call them pretty notions," Mr. Denys said, moderate but sincere in his praises.

"Pretty notions or magnificent notions, they would not answer at Marshleas. I doubt whether they will answer at Cote."

Mr. Midas was another critic. Mr. Midas had notions neither magnificent nor pretty: "We cannot afford this style of thing at Cam-

bourne. I want to make the best of my property. The houses are springing up like toadstools all over the place. I have just bought a share in a brewery," said he, and dropped his eyeglass after a very slight and cursory inspection.

"That depends on what you mean by the best. Fine building has always something to show for itself," was Mr. Denys' rejoinder.

This was at one of the Thursday afternoon receptions which Mrs. Denys held in the Dutch garden. It was very fully attended, perhaps because it was the last of the season, or perhaps because it was known that Captain Meade of Indian celebrity, Guy Francis Meade, was staying at the Manor House, and stories of a highly romantic nature were going about, in which he and Navestock were connected.

Nothing of Captain Meade's strange, eventful history appeared on the surface. He had served in the ranks, but there was no sign

of it. His lean athletic figure, and fair, sunburnt face, were of the same type as scores of English gentlemen who have had hard training and done good work in the East. He had come home to his mother at Updeane only since the summer, and though his name was familiar as a household word to the majority of the gay and fashionable crowd assembled in the garden, personally he was a stranger amongst strangers. Mr. Denys had met him first at Navestock, where he was visiting his brother, the gentleman-farmer. John Robert Meade had lately married the second daughter of Sir Thomas Britton, a good connection, but little money on either side. Arthur, the rector of Navestock, had gone to Auldcaster for a wife, and had chosen Grace Daventry, sister to Mrs. James Herrick of Knowle, and cousin to Mrs. Denys of Cote. Guy Francis was a bachelor, and said he meant

to keep so—with no other fortune than his sword how could he buy the costly commodity of a wife? Besides, he had seen no fair yet, fair enough to captivate his fancy. And he had a secret. Mr. Denys had shown him the beautiful house constructed of the best of the cut stone and oak timber saved from the old mansion of Navestock, and had put forward a plea for inviting him to Cote which was singular in these modern days, and at which he had paused for a while; but having come to the Manor House he showed himself friendly: "Willing to be treated like a son and a big brother," as somebody in the neighbourhood observed to another somebody, who circulated the observation with notes and addenda.

The little boys had taken to Captain Meade amazingly. Their mother had said he was a hero, and Marie-Irene had a book of heroes —Jack the Giant-Killer and others—out of

which she read to them, giving popular illustrations to exalt the interest.

"Captain Meade comes of the ancient family of Jack the Giant-Killer. The giant's castle was at Navestock. Papa pulled it down, and it was full of dead men's bones. Then he built a palace all of marble and glass. Captain Meade will be Prince there one day."

"Will you be Princess, Sissy?" says Hugh Oliver; and Captain Meade, who was listening to the new version of the old legend, laughed and blushed through all his tan.

"The Princess is not discovered yet. Probably she is sleeping yet," said Marie-Irene in solemn sing-song quite unmoved.

Marie-Irene appeared that afternoon as a slim, dark-eyed, growing girl in a white muslin dress and blue sash, her Sunday and holiday dress at the convent. She had a happy, merry face. Duchess Adela took kind, approving

notice of her, and Lady Herrick whispered that she would be lovely, like her mother. She stood in grave simplicity at the hero's elbow while Colonel Hayman talked long with him of modern tactics and arms of precision; and when the rector sought to be informed of the real influence of missionaries, she maintained her position in unconscious peace of mind. She liked to hear him, and perhaps he had bidden her stay; for as soon as they were released from the clergyman's musing remarks, they strolled hand in hand down the broad walk in the midst of the garden, straight to the sun-dial where Mr. Denys was standing in conversation with Cousin Elizabeth Paul.

"Those premature arrangements seldom come to anything," Mrs. Essex-Brough confided to a friend from Cambourne, with gestures and glances at the two sufficiently explanatory of her meaning.

On the sunny side of the high clipped hedge of yew that divided the Dutch garden from the orchard, Mrs. Denys was pacing gently to and fro, lending an arm to old Duchess Adela. She carried in her hands a great bunch of roses, white-clustered and red and deep salmon-tinted. She wore a blue summer dress and straw hat; for though it was October the air was soft and delicate. Her beautiful face had an expression of cheerful contentment, as if all things were going well with her again. She had a character for diplomacy amongst her intimate friends, and was being generally credited with the invention of other schemes besides that of the Green Square. The bright-eyed, acute elder lady was at this moment inquiring of her how much or how little truth there was in the various rumours that she had lately heard. Mrs. Denys answered her tranquilly

that there was a body of truth in them all, but how much of it time might realise only time could tell. This she said concerning the chief rumour out of which the rest arose :

"Mr. Denys cannot disentail Navestock, that we know, but he can if he will make it better worth Hugh Oliver's while to leave than to take it. But it is not on that I count. My sons must learn to do right. They shall know that generation after generation death has disputed with Denys of Cote the title to what was got by murder and fraud, and that death has always had the best of it."

"You believe the tradition?" Duchess Adela said with serious amazement.

"I do believe it. I believe that Navestock was cursed for Giles Denys' sake, and that the curse will pursue his successors until restitution is made. I did not believe it once : I made light of it. Since I have

had children to stand in peril, my faith is quickened."

"But your children are not the descendants of Giles Denys."

"If they keep the accursed thing they will come under his doom. I take God at His word, and am afraid. Why should my children die when their lives may be redeemed by letting Navestock go?"

Duchess Adela was not prepared to answer the young mother's appeal. She asked what Mr. Denys thought.

"Hugh is very good to me. In all that belongs to the future we consult together. The day of small things is gone by at Cote; we love the place, and shall use it as owners do use a place they love. It will be a sufficient inheritance for our eldest son. Wilfred will have for his portion those lands detached from Navestock that are not in the old terrier."

"And what will Captain Meade do for the gift he is to receive? Will he some day marry that pretty child? Look at her—he is telling her some startling adventure, and she is listening with all her ears."

Through an archway in the yew hedge the two ladies had come in sight of the group by the sun-dial. It was to Marie-Irene that the story was being told, but Captain Meade had other hearers as well. The climax was greeted with an explosion of laughter. Mrs. Denys gazed at them serenely, and passed on. Her mind was occupied with graver considerations than the amusement of the hour. She did not wish to let misapprehensions arise, and took pains to clear away any that her old friend might have conceived.

"Captain Meade is free as air. No one must imagine that there has been any pro-

mise," she said. "If he take Marie-Irene, it will be of her goodwill and his own choice. He is returning to India next spring, and she will be safe in her convent for three or four years to come. If she dream of him there, she is not likely to be disenchanted at waking. A girl with any heart and soul at all must think a little of what a man is, and what he has done. There is nothing settled, nothing certain—indeed, how could there be? It is vain to reckon on long life, though Hugh comes of a long-enduring race —the Denyses of Acklam have averaged eighty years—but I have shown you what my desire is, and it is my dear husband's desire also."

"Then I hope it may come to pass. It seems a good desire," Duchess Adela said warmly, and closed the subject with a kind nod.

The great lady took a cup of coffee, and

then took her leave, which was the signal of departure for some others of Mrs. Denys' visitors. There were rich Americans in Cote that season who had lingered over this day in the intent to see her, denying themselves a week of Paris for the conceit of saying at home that they had been in company with an English duchess. That she was an old lady of simple manners and unremarkable appearance, at whom they looked without speaking, signified nothing; they went away deeply gratified, and with profuse thanks to Mrs. Denys who had afforded them the coveted opportunity.

Mrs. Denys gave, indeed, much pleasure to strangers and neighbours, and derived much pleasure herself, from these easy gatherings in the garden. She heard repeatedly that they were good for the place as bringing together people who would not other-

wise meet, and creating an agreeable society out of scattered elements. Her position enabled her to do it without airs of patronage or any assumption that could chafe the fretful dignity of lesser or poorer folk. That Cote should find favour as a winter residence was a matter that intimately concerned its permanent prosperity, and houses were hired that autumn by several families who announced their intention to stay until the east winds of the following spring were well over.

This influx of company, with the promise of abundant work for the labouring people at levelling and draining the Green Square, gave a bright look-out for the dull weather. There had been two cases of fever in the village during the summer, but they had been carefully isolated, and the parish doctor had lately reported to the squire and the clergyman a clean bill of health.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LAW AND GOSPEL.

"Blessed is he that considereth the poor."

THERE was a small dinner-party at the rectory that evening, and no placider faces than the six which assembled at Mr. Clarges' round table about seven o'clock could have been found in the peninsula. The clergyman and his wife had the good things of this world in peaceful possession; Providence had cushioned them softly against the cares and anxieties that vex the poor in purse, and other people's troubles they bore with that equanimity for which human nature is proverbial. Mr. Matheson the engineer was there, radiant with health, courage, and suc-

cess, just engaged to the third Miss Britton, whose views of marriage were the same as her eldest sister's, who also was present, both being on a visit at the rectory. Mr. Quorn was there, a bachelor of liberal opinions, whose reputation and fortune were made; and Miss Nancy Clarges was there, invited at the eleventh hour to make up the half-dozen, and laid under a strict injunction not to let her eagerness to speak overcome her politeness, no matter how perplexed by the gentlemen's ironic method.

Mr. Quorn had been staying for a week at the inn, winding up some business that he had begun and not finished when he made up his mind to decline the stewardship of Cote. He was an old friend and contemporary of the rector. Mr. Matheson and he having taken in company several walks and rides round the neighbourhood, treated

of what they had seen with the dispassionate criticism of independent persons amongst their intimates.

Mr. Matheson had been giving an account of his perambulations with Mr. Quorn that day, and ended by saying: "You do very venturesome things in the peninsula, Clarges. Since I was last here on Mr. Denys' business he has made preparations to convey to himself all that common pasture called the Oxgangs."

"I suppose Mr. Denys is acting on the advice of his solicitor," said the rector.

Mr. Quorn smiled: "That is the serviceable fiction behind which he will be able to retire without discredit when some inquisitive, meddlesome person comes forward to question and dispute his title to his neighbours' fields."

"Mr. Denys is lord of the manor," cried Miss Nancy defensively. Her sister-in-law

tried to frown her into a silence, but Miss Nancy, though thoroughly disapproving of Mr. Denys herself, acknowledged him as the squire, and would have felt it a disloyalty to sit by and be dumb when a stranger assailed him. She therefore repeated, and with the more emphasis because of the attempt to check her: "Mr. Denys is lord of the manor—lord of the manor, you know."

"Yes," said the lawyer. "Being shepherd of the fold, he can shear the sheep at his pleasure. That is the modern function of shepherds."

Miss Nancy glanced at her brother with a puzzled face, but there was no solution of the enigmatical speech for her there. The rector's hand was shading his eyes, and he was blushing under that covert.

"And that is a hard case about the Blythes, who have been turned out of the Orchard," Mr. Matheson remarked.

"As to it's being a hard case, there is something to be said on the other side," the clergyman rejoined, emerging into the light.

"There usually is something to be said on the other side. What is it?"

"Mr. Denys had no interest in Cote when the Blythes' lease was granted, and it was not a lease in perpetuity, as some suppose. It expired last Christmas. They had six months' grace to find a new home, and three weeks more on account of Richard's wife. Mr. Denys is quite incapable of an inhumanity. If Crump told the grandmother she would never be disturbed, that was only Crump's way of making things pleasant for an old neighbour. He had no authority from Mr. Denys to give any such promise. And if they have kept the homestead in repair, and have gone on planting up to the last season, they did it at their own risk. They

ought to have been wiser than to sink their little savings in what they had no security of keeping."

"Is it true that Mr. Denys determined on the eviction of the whole family because the young shepherd stood out for the right of way that passes through the fields near the Manor House?"

"I cannot answer for Mr. Denys' motives. If it be true, it is their own fault. I carried Mrs. Blythe a message myself from Mr. Denys, and told her at the same time that though the locking of the gates was an inconvenience to me in getting about the parish, yet I was willing to bear it."

Miss Nancy hung her head. Mr. Quorn said drily: "And you hoped that might prove a way of peace?"

There was a rather prolonged pause. Miss Nancy burst out in a gust of emotion: "It

is a pity the road was ever stopped, because it has broken the habit the poor people in the out-lying cottages had of coming to church on Sunday evening. Nobody considered *them.* As for Mrs. Blythe, we are all very sorry for her, but she is a self-opiniated woman, and has not been to the Lord's Table for months—never since Henry carried her that message, though we have said and done everything in our power to soften her heart."

"I should give up coming to the Lord's Table, too, if the parson took the squire's side when I was being unfairly turned out of house and home, Miss Nancy," said the engineer. "In fact, I should find it the harder to forgive him because he is the parson."

"Dear Henry has nothing to do with it," cried his sister with irrepressible flow. "I am sure if the Orchard belonged to dear

Henry, he would never have let her go. But if Mr. Denys feels differently, the land is his, and she could not carry the fruit-trees away. The law gives them to him. And Mrs. Curlew, papa's aunt, and a most clever woman, always said that she should have no scruple at all in taking whatever the law gave her."

"Boswell immortalises a lady who was of Mrs. Curlew's opinion," said Mr. Quorn. "She was tried for stealing a counterpane. The evidence was against her, but the judge, who had a weakness for the sex, summed up in her favour. The jury acquitted the lady, and she said with smiling urbanity, as she quitted the court: 'Now that the counterpane *is my own*, I shall make a petticoat of it!'"

The rector laughed gently, and Miss Nancy, a little disconcerted—a very little—

laughed too. Mrs. Clarges rose, and said they must leave the gentlemen to themselves when they began quoting their witty books. The gentlemen drew their chairs closer, but the same subject was continued.

"So far as the law goes, Mr. Denys has nothing to fear on account of his usage of the Blythes, unless it be a difficulty in finding a lawyer who is a gentleman to accept the stewardship of Cote," Mr. Quorn said. "And, Clarges, old friend, I should like to know what advantage to a parish it is to have for pastor a clergyman secure for life in his benefice, whose notion of being a faithful shepherd and guardian of his flock consists in tamely bearing the rich man's oppression himself, and carrying his threats to the poor?"

Mr. Clarges' mild face grew hot. "But the law of our country must be our guide when

disputes and difficulties arise," he argued with quiet pertinacity.

"Stick to your own text-book, or take Sir Thomas Browne's opinion: 'Let not the law of thy country be the *non ultra* of thy honesty, nor think that always good enough that the law will make good. Narrow not the law of charity, equity, mercy. Join Gospel righteousness with legal right.'"

Mr. Clarges did not relish these admonitions from the man of the world. He sighed, closed his eyes for a moment, said he had done as he would be done by, pushed about the wine, and spoke of Beauminster—Mr. Quorn and he were Beauminster scholars of the same generation. Pleasant, lively, and awful reminiscences made the next half-hour pass swiftly. Mrs. Clarges in the drawing-room overheard their cheerful voices and laughter; and that her husband's rare enjoy-

ment in his old comrade's company might not be abridged, she proposed to send them in coffee instead of a summons to her own tea-table. Her sister smiled approval, and Miss Nancy being always an unselfish woman, and naturally indulgent to the foibles of the other sex, said tenderly: "Yes, poor things, men are like children—fond of a little amusement. Pray, let them have it."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

UNDER SENTENCE.

"Death beats with even foot at poor men's doors,
And at the gates of palaces."

Mrs. Denys had not been yet since her return from Scotland to speak to her poor neighbours at Moffatt's Corner, but Phœbe had been, and had reported well of Mr. Crump as having had the place the Blythes had gone into put into decent order and repair. Phœbe was not inclined to say much, and Mrs. Denys was not inclined to ask distressing questions. But one brilliant morning about a week after the reception in the Dutch garden, Mr. Denys bespoke his wife's company for a meeting with Mr.

Matheson upon the ground where the new church was to be, and on their way they met Mrs. Blythe crossing the field to fetch the doctor.

"Poor Mary's very low, and can't tell what ails her," she said. "Richard's not satisfied, and she's asked to see the doctor."

The widow was white and tremulous herself, and in a hurry. She would not have stopped had not Mrs. Denys stopped first, and in answering the lady's inquiries she looked at the squire. She looked at the squire because his countenance had changed suddenly from an air of cheerful occupation to one of blank annoyance. Delia also perceived the change, and had her own interpretation of it.

They went on, their thoughts distracted from the previous subject, but absently talking of it until they were joined by the gentlemen they had come to meet—Mr. Clarges, Mr. Matheson,

Mr. Rufus, a distinguished church architect, and Mr. Wilton, who had consented to act in this instance as his clerk of the works. Old Crump was there too, who doffed his hat to the lady, and directed an anxious, inquisitive glance towards his master. That something had occurred, vexatious and disconcerting to both squire and agent, was evident to all who knew them, and the rector sought a word apart with the squire at once. It was a word that disquieted him too, but the others were waiting, and they turned to their business.

That was to decide on the precise spot where the church must stand. There was a good deal of measuring and moving to and fro, and surveying distances, but the final judgment was that it must stand on the highest level, and opposite to the broad Cleft Road, at a point where it might be spied by ships far out at sea. By the time this decision was

arrived at, Mrs. Denys was thoroughly tired, and leaving what else needed settling to be discussed in her absence, she walked straight to Moffatt's Corner, and knocking at Mrs. Blythe's open door, asked if she could come in, and rest a little. Mr. Denys saw by the direction of her steps whither she was going, and Mr. Clarges made a start to call her back, but paused half-way in his deliberative fashion, and before his mind was made up what to do for the best, Mrs. Denys had entered, and the door was shut.

The house-place inside was as white and clean as hands could make it; the old clock with its familiar beat, the dresser, and window-flowers were all there as at the Orchard, and everything had the customary aspect of thrift and orderliness. Mrs. Blythe had got back, but the doctor had not been yet. He was out on his rounds when she went, but would be sure

to call in when he heard—she had every confidence in Mr. Swift, she said, with an anxious reassuring look towards her daughter-in-law.

The young woman was sitting listlessly in the rocking-chair by the window with her baby in her lap, and her little boy playing at her feet with a new toy cart and horses. Mrs. Denys took notice of him, and his mother turned her eyes, wan and filling with tears, upon the child.

"His father brought 'em from Michaelmas Fair to coax him stop indoors," she said. "They are a rough lot the neighbours here, and I can't bide to let him go with the bairns, and learn bad words. I'm always telling grandmother we had better have gone out o' Cote altogether than have come here."

Perhaps if she could have known what a cruel reproach she was preparing for the poor old woman, Mary would not have said so so

often. Mrs. Blythe was making dinner ready against Richard's coming home at noon, and her withered hands shook as she went on peeling potatoes and dropping them into a bowl of water.

Suddenly Mary cried out: "Open the door, grandmother, or I think I shall faint!"

Mrs. Denys, who was next the door, opened it quickly, and the widow went in haste and brought a cup of water, which she fetched from the pump that was common to all the houses at the Corner. After Mary had drunk, the little boy drank copiously too.

"I'm feeling very ill," Mary said, and was silent a minute or two, watching dully the stir and movement in the distance. "What may the gentlemen be doing, ma'am, so busy over yonder—is it building they are thinking of?" she asked with weary languor.

Mrs. Denys explained that the new church

was to be built there: "You will see it from where you sit, rising day by day. It is to be a large and very beautiful church. They tell me that it will be five years in building."

"I shall not live to see it above the foundations. It is borne in on my mind that I shall not live to see the trees bud again—yet I should ha' liked to see them. It was so bonny at the Orchard i' the spring-time. Richard set a golden pippin when our first little lad was born; he didn't set none for this one because we was condemned to go. But life's soon over. We all do fade as a leaf," she ended with a sigh. And from the lime-trees in her sight fell softly a shower of yellow leaves.

"Poor lass, thou's out o' spirits. But thou'll not be so easy quit o' this troublesome world," Mrs. Blythe said with a vigorous effort at a rally. "Thou must bide, an' fend

for thy childer thyself. I've had toiling and moiling wi' childer enough, an' my day's work should be well nigh done."

"Thou'll not be plagued wi' 'em long, grandmother. When death takes me, he'll leave the door upo' the latch, an' come again. I'm heart-sore for Richard, that I am. If we'd gone to Cambourne, then maybe I might ha' been spared."

"Don't give up yet, Mary, and I promise you this—if I live to see the trees bud again, you shall have a home in a sweeter spot—you shall, you shall, indeed," Mrs. Denys said with energetic feeling.

"There's Mr. Swift coming—we'll hear what he says," Mary rejoined with a feeble smile, and held out her hand in thanks to the lady.

It was the last time. Mrs. Denys did not see her again; for what Mr. Swift said was that he desired everybody who had not

business at Moffatt's Corner to keep away. Phœbe had to keep away like the rest, or quit the Manor House altogether, and night after night cried herself to sleep for pity of her people. It was the fever, and the dread of it trenched on the comfort and prosperity of the whole village, from the highest to the lowest in it—this revival in the decline of the year recalling a former visitation of great severity.

One afternoon late in the month Mrs. Denys betook herself to the Dutch garden with a weight on her spirits thát she could not throw off. The fall of the leaf was lovely that year, gradual and slow, and the airs of summer lingered long. But the serene, grave composure of the garden oppressed her more and more. In vain was the blue sky dappled with sunny fleeces, in vain sweet herbs

and scented bushes gave out their odours, and the rich crimsons and purples, scarlets and yellows of the autumn flowers blazed in their green enclosures. She had neither eyes nor heart for any of these simple joys. A robin was singing enchantingly from a russet briar, but she had no ears for his song. The sorrow amongst her poor neighbours had seized on her imagination, and possessed her for the time like a personal calamity.

She changed the scene, and went to her beautiful drawing-room, but she could not change her mood. The fire was shining ruddily in the half-gloom, and beyond the great window lay that glorious picture of the sea in repose that had charmed her at her bringing home to Cote on her wedding-day. Through the open door she heard the little feet and voices of her children coming up the stairs, and went to meet them. Wilfred

wanted to know why his mother's face was wet when he kissed her, and Hugh Oliver, seeing that she wore her hat and cloak, wished to go out walking again with her. But she had done her walking for that afternoon, and took them to her boudoir instead, to be amused by their chatter in the twilight till her husband came home. It was the first day of the hunting-season, and he had been away since the morning in the company, as usual, of Mr. and Mrs. Essex-Brough.

From her boudoir window Mrs. Denys could see the gate and two gentlemen on the road outside, who met, exchanged a few words, and parted abruptly at the sound of the church-bell. They were Mr. Swift and Mr. Clarges.

The doctor was a man of dry sarcastic humour, which he could afford to indulge, not being bound to live by his practice. The poor liked him—they said he was so tender;

but there was not much tenderness in his rejoinders to the clergyman's remarks. Some strong things had been said, unadvisedly said, against Mr. Denys in reference to the eviction of the Blythes from the Orchard, and the rector was pleased to stand forward as his defender. The squire would have preferred his silence.

"Mr. Denys was strictly within his right, and not only that—he was considerate, and even generous, to the widow, who is proud and obstinate to the last degree. Richard's wife would have gone to Cambourne thankfully. If it was necessary for them to clear out of the Orchard (and it was necessary), they were not forced to go to Moffatt's Corner." Thus the rector.

"Certainly not—when the world was all before them where to choose. Unreasonable people, they will be asking next for a

span of your freehold. Hark! there it goes."

The church-bell jangled, then tolled one, and stopped. After the lapse of some minutes it began again, and continued tolling.

Phœbe came hurriedly in: "Oh, dear mistress, it is for poor Mary and the little baby—*both*. I must go—I must go to grandmother," she cried, and burst into a passion of tears.

"Kiss the children, and go," Mrs. Denys said, putting a strong constraint on herself, but her tears gathered thick and fell too.

Hugh Oliver stood seriously aghast at the strange spectacle of Phœbe crying, but Willie was touched with sympathy, and had to be hushed and comforted in his mother's arms. She took him on her knees by the window, and bade him look out for papa in his fine red coat. Hugh Oliver came to look out also, and there they were, and

the death-bell still going, when Mr. Denys rode in at the gate. The elder boy rushed away to meet him, but Delia stayed where she was, and let him seek her.

He came straight upstairs, slowly and heavily, like a man who is reluctant or very tired. Delia moved towards him with Willie clinging to her neck. "You know what has happened, Delia, by that dreadful bell," he said.

"Yes, dear," was her answer with an irrepressible sob.

"Send the children away. I want to talk to you."

"I cannot. Phœbe has gone to her poor old grandmother."

Mr. Denys rang the bell, and Mrs. Brice appeared. Willie pouted at going, but was carried off, his mother attending to his whimpering cry, which increased in pitifulness with the distance. She could only half listen

to what her husband said—which was nothing after all but extenuations of the hard decree of which these deaths were sure to look to his neighbours like the cruel consequences. Delia's own heart made excuses for him that he could not have made.

"I know you are sorry, I am sure you are sorry. You could not foresee that they would be the innocent sacrifices," she said.

"I met Swift. He told me that the well at Moffatt's Corner ought to be sealed up. He has warned the labourers on the church ground not to drink there."

Delia had turned to the hearth, and was gazing into the fire. She said nothing, remembering Mary's depression and loss of heart in the prospect of change, and of the miseries the change implied.

Mr. Denys went on: "Swift confesses that his craft are not very intelligent in the treat-

ment of fevers yet. We have had this fever at Cote, you know how often. It reappears in the same houses. Essex-Brough and his wife are going to Cambourne to-morrow. Would you like to remove with the children to Acklam, Delia?"

"Not unless you desire it. I should not like to forsake the place while it is under this cloud. The Manor House is healthy. The air is sweet, the water is good. No doubt, those poor souls at Moffatt's Corner were poisoned."

Mr. Denys moved to the window. The bell had ceased now, and the October night was closing darkly in. The boudoir was almost in the dark too. Mrs. Denys was excited, had some latent fears perhaps. She fancied she heard Willie still wailing, but it was only fancy. Willie was sitting on the rug in his white frock and crimson sash leaning his pretty curled head against Phœbe's empty

chair, and watching the door till his mother came to carry him to the drawing-room, as her custom was for the last few minutes before dinner and his bed-time. Hugh Oliver was undergoing his toilette. Phœbe's absence had a little disorganised things. There was no light in the nursery but the firelight, and the leaping flames made grotesque shadows, mopping and mowing upon the walls.

The door was ajar, and the little boys heard their father's step approaching first. Willie got on his feet, calling to him : " Papa, papa," and then mamma came in like a shining angel, and lifted him in her tender arms.

" My head, mother, my head," said the child, and croodled down, his hot cheek against the cool rose of hers.

" Willie is not like himself. What does my Willie want ? " she whispered back. " What does my sweet Willie want ? "

Willie wanted to lie where he was, and for aught he knew, wanted nothing else. His father saw something in the child's countenance that alarmed him, and Delia caught his alarm.

"Oh, Hugh, is the curse coming home to us?" she said. "Pray, send for Mr. Swift. The children have been at the Glen House all the afternoon; they are there constantly."

Mr. Swift could say nothing satisfactory when he came. The child's symptoms were grave.

The shock to Delia was terrible for the moment. She could not rest all night, and when she fell into a broken slumber as the day dawned, her mind, wandering on the confines of sleep and memory, betrayed recollections and thoughts and fears that were a torture to her husband.

She laughed to herself, whispering low: "Hugh asks me why I cannot sing. *Agnes*

had a most sweet voice. The nightingale sings with a thorn in her heart: but I had none. . . . A little bird came to the window—it had a broken wing—we put it in Willie's cage—he is *so* good, my Willie—*I am his mother, you know; ask God to spare him.* . . . Listen! it is the death-bell, Hugh—once for a child, twice for a woman, thrice for a man. *You shall not have a silent funeral, dear; you shall have singing.* . . . Our Father which art in heaven——"

Mr. Denys spoke at his wife's ear: "Wake up, Delia, wake up. This is worse than no sleep at all. You are light-headed."

"I was saying my prayers—a great comfort, dear; I wish you knew it. I have not had a good night, but I shall have strength for the day. I have always found it so. If anything can be done for those poor people at Moffatt's Corner, let it be done. I will go to the nursery now, and Mrs. Brice shall take some rest."

CHAPTER XXXV.

BEYOND RETRIEVAL.

"The hand of the Lord hath wrought this : in whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind."—*Job.*

It was the old familiar story that will bear no long telling. Death had knocked first at the poor man's door, and waiting there cast his shadow across the rich man's path.

When Willie had been ill a week his father asked Mr. Swift : "Will the child die ?" and the doctor said : "The child will die."

Delia felt as if she had known it from the beginning, and when the hour came she bore her agony bravely. She let Mrs. Brice take the little wasted body, and went to her hus-

band, who seemed the worst smitten of the two when the end came.

"God be good to both of us, dear Hugh," she said, and knelt down by him, leaning her brow against his breast, and crying.

"It is over?" he asked hoarsely.

"Yes, thank God. It was very pitiful to see him suffer."

"I know—I know."

The next day came Mr. Clarges to offer ghostly comfort. He followed the servant up the stairs, and through the open door heard Mrs. Denys' plaintive, tired voice replying to the inquiry whether she would receive his visit: "No, Hugh; I am in trouble. The little man has no message for me now: let him come at another time."

Mr. Denys went out to his friend with a palliating word, but it seemed a very unkind cut to the clergyman. Mrs. Blythe had re-

fused his alms and ministrations too. Woman-like. Women expect their clergyman to do and say the thing that is right, and not the mere thing that will please whether lover or adversary, and the rector had broken this law of simplicity and truth. He was confused and angry more than he was hurt, but his wife discouraged his pious indignation. She said he must take no notice of Mrs. Denys' repulse; he must let it pass, and forget it. His sister Nancy was more faithful. She told him that it was his one fault, which had been a cloud between him and other poor souls in mourning, though not, perhaps, so conspicuous in their mourning as the squire's wife and the old widow from the Orchard, of whose tragedy all the world round Cote was talking.

It had run into a tragedy, indeed. The elder boy had died like a moth in a flame,

suddenly; and Mrs. Blythe, worn out with nursing and frenzied with grief, took on so violently after, that her grandson Richard, yielding to the advice of Mr. Swift, had let her be moved by the parish. It was a cruel stroke, but it was done before Mrs. Denys heard of it. Phœbe came home again to the Manor House, and the whited sepulchre at Moffatt's Corner was finally shut up on the day that little Wilfred Denys was carried to his burial. It was only a few steps from the gate to the grave, but the village folk thronged the way, telling terrible tales one to another, while they waited for the procession, of what had been in days gone by.

"It is the curse. Denys has earned a new lease of it," said the patriarchal Todd to Crump, his contemporary; and Crump did not say nay, but chaffered with blue lips,

and stared into the distance, his visage bitter with anxiety and distress.

The women had gathered about the mound newly raised on the spot where Mary and her children were sleeping. Richard was away with his sheep on the down; for labour goes on and life goes on, and men leave all things behind them.

The squire's wife came with him, and he led his other little son by the hand. John, George, and Marie-Irene followed, and a few of the servants.

"He has his lion-look, the squire; trouble takes no hold on him at all," Todd remarked again to Crump; but Crump did not think so.

The child was laid in that enclosure under the chancel window where Mr. Denys' other dead were laid. The rector of Navestock had come over to take part in the service, and

several other gentlemen had come as a mark of respect. Mr. Denys felt that he could have dispensed with it. He disliked demonstrations for his own part, and was sure these neighbours and friends of his would indulge in reminiscences and curious speculations how he viewed this death of his little son, and would view it themselves in the lurid light of the tradition belonging to his predecessors at Navestock and Cote. And some of them did so, in fact.

Mrs. Denys' fortitude had been wonderful since the child died, but her husband had fallen at intervals into deep depression. She could not look into his heart. His grief was not single and simple as hers was, but from words that escaped him she knew that he had a sense of guilt towards her, and of pity as if her bereavement was his doing. She had to be strong for both. They were standing together

by the little coffin when it was closed, and seeing his gloom, she said in a natural, broken voice: "Cheer up, dear Hugh! It is the Lord—let Him do what seemeth Him best;" and there was no revolt in her heart against God then or ever. At the grave, before all these spectators, Mr. Denys kept up and seemed himself, but when Hugh Oliver hid his red eyes and quivering mouth against his father's sleeve, and the earth rattled on the coffin—"Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes"—his head dropped with a groan, and a shudder convulsed his powerful frame.

The great force and nobility of Mrs. Denys' mind was from this time brought into fuller exercise. Her husband turned to her from all others, and trusted in her before all others. They had lost so much of what goes to make life good and glad that it behoved them to gather up the fragments if they would not

suffer worse spoliation—the loss of heart, hope, and energy; and where his failed, her high courage came to the rescue.

Her friends remarked on Mrs. Denys as a miracle of resignation. Mrs. Moth opined that she was not perhaps a very affectionate mother to her children. There was, indeed, a peace in her sorrow that surprised herself; for she missed the dear little fellow out of her life, out of every waking hour of her daily life. She was always fond of having her children about her. Their chatter was delightful to her. They loved one another, and Hugh Oliver had exercised a benevolent despotism over Wilfred, to keep him out of mischief, and guide him in the way he should go, that was both useful and amusing. He did not part with his little brother all at once. It had been Willie's business and pleasure to feed the birds that came to the nursery window, and Willie's robin was

a character that figured in Hugh Oliver's breakfast-table conversation all through the cold weather. Willie's toys, especially the old ones, were set in order, and the order of them was constantly changed as he had changed it —only his drum was never beaten, nor his trumpet blown. Phœbe had made a warlike trophy of these with his tin sword and red leather trappings above the chimney-piece, and there they hung through many a dusty year, sacred to his innocent memory as other trophies of arms are sacred in other homes out of which a soldier son has gone who returns no more. Willie's books were brought regularly to his mother's table, and laid open at some favourite picture that he liked to have done into a story. Hugh Oliver could read for himself, and now, when he sat on the floor beside her, there was silence in the room for quite long spaces. It was very different to the busy, restless hour

when there were two of them. Hugh Oliver's pious acts in commemoration of his brother fell one by one into disuse, but their mother never ceased to cherish sweet thoughts of her little child who was gone, and continued to visit the nursery window and feed the birds, and to call the robins "Willie's" when Willie, had he lived, would have been a man.

The fever did not stop at Moffatt's Corner and the Manor House. A young labourer at drainage work on the Green Square died of it, and two other men similarly employed fell ill, but recovered. A servant at the Glen House died, and the only child of a family of strangers in the place. All the visitors that could left Cote, and Mr. Swift put it very plainly to Mr. Denys, that unless certain root-and-branch reforms and regulations were expedited, this episode of misfortune would be prolonged.

Mr. Quorn reappeared on the scene, and Mr. Denys heard him again on some matters which had previously been in dispute between them. A considerable piece of land bordering on the old high road was laid out for building cottages, with gardens in front and rear enclosed by a well-set hedge of holly, and planted with fruit-trees which Mrs. Denys provided. These cottages were her peculiar charge; and the numerous inquiries for them, before they were half ready to be occupied, proved how great was the need of them felt by industrious labourers and workmen established for some years in the village. A third engineer, introduced by Mr. Quorn to consult with Mr. Matheson, did not advise the storage of water when an ample supply, flowing fresh from its source, could be had by the diversion of the stream that ran through the Cleft. This seemed a strong, even suicidal, measure to the

native folk, who regarded the Cleft as their peculiar charm, singularity, and attraction ; but Mr. Denys bowed to professional authority, the water-works were urged forward without delay, and a landscape-gardener was employed to beautify the grey shallows of the ravine with home and foreign ferns, flowers, and shrubs, such as grow wild in moist and shady places.

Crump went over to the party of sound progress. "I tell you the Cleft will be very pretty when the season comes. What's prettier than flowers or sweeter?" was his surly, consoling rejoinder to his remonstrative neighbours. "The squire's lady is seeing to it all herself, and sparing no money for seeds and cuttings. Mr. Quorn talked of a reservoir, so he did, under the down and over our heads ; but these young engineer fellows say that our geological formation is not suitable to a reservoir, and if ever we got one made,

it would burst some fine day, and wash us all to kingdom come—which none of us is prepared for, I expect." With this dumfoundering argument the old agent hobbled away, grumbling, but satisfied that he had laid hold of the thing by the right handle, and that the contrary voices would acknowledge it by and by.

Crump spoke of Mrs. Denys as seeing to the adornment of the Cleft herself. Mr. and Mrs. Denys saw to many things themselves this winter. It was better to be up and doing than to sink in despair for what was beyond recall, though the effort was a weariness often. Mr. Essex-Brough had taken his wife and his horses, and had gone into Leicestershire for the rest of the hunting-season. There was no company at the Glen House to entice Mr. Denys away from home, and he reverted to Delia's society as in the

first days of their marriage. Phœbus was brought out of his stable, and she was persuaded to ride with him again; she even rode once or twice to see the hounds throw off, that he might not deny himself his healthful, customary pursuit because she refused to share it. The mail-phaeton was in frequent requisition, and Hugh Oliver, lonely without his brother, sat through many a sunny cold drive, warmly cherished between his father and mother. They carried him with them to Navestock now whenever they went there.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

FRUIT IS SEED.

"All was ended now, the hope, and the fear, and the sorrow;
All the aching of heart, the restless, unsatisfied longing;
All the dull deep pain, and constant anguish of patience."

LONGFELLOW.

AT Christmas the dull, slow current of time was broken into eddies again by the arrival of John Denys with a young companion chosen for life, a girl good and pretty enough to please all the world, and perfectly suited to the one whom her qualities and charms most concerned. She was called Eleanour. George was gone to Rome, and was absent that year, but Marie-Irene came as usual, welcome as sunshine and music to the old house lying dark and quiet in the shadow of death.

All the servants were glad of her. Everybody was glad of her. She was a reason for putting off gravity and beginning to smile again. But her eyes showed the quick tears often at first—when Hugh Oliver pattered downstairs alone, running after Sissy, when she saw the trophy Phœbe had set up in the nursery, and the one grave more in the churchyard. But most when she looked into her father's face.

Mr. Denys' gloom did not pass, and there seemed no remedy. Mr. Swift promised his wife that it would clear away—as he had watched it clear away after his former more terrible bereavement—but she must wait. Meanwhile he directed her to encourage her husband's active interest in the various works going on in the place, and to keep him up to the sports that were naturally his delight.

The arrival of the young people was a great

help to Mrs. Denys. Every fine hunting morning saw a large party riding off to the meet, and every evening was enlivened by the bubbling over of happy hearts whose joy was not to be suppressed by others' sorrow. John's Eleanour was a sweet singer, and nothing soothed and softened Mr. Denys like a song. He would leave the door open, and go away to his own room, and listen in the distance. Marie-Irene was a singer too, not accomplished yet, but as finely gifted as her mother had been. It was a good sign when Mr. Denys began one night to talk of her to Delia, anticipating the time when the little girl would equal her mother in performance.

The next day after this he called for her to go out with him, and they took the road across the fields, going up to the Orchard. All was bare and bleak, but Marie-Irene

remembered the beautiful golden fringes on the oaks and the blossoming fruit-trees in spring, and talked by the way of how she liked to go there when Phœbe's grandmother lived in the comfortable thatched cottage—ending with the inquiry where she lived now; for no one had told the little girl that part of the cruel, sad story.

Mr. Denys seemed not to hear—he did not answer whether he heard or not, and Marie-Irene, accustomed to respect his silence, did not press the question, and held her peace until they came to the gate. Already an air of forlornness was creeping about the place, and Mr. Denys walked in to make an inquisitorial tour of the premises where the new tenants seemed likely to prove a very bad exchange for their predecessors. Nobody was at home. A lean and hungry cat dozed in the chill sun on the top of the

water-butt. A sow with a numerous progeny had left her sty to roam and root in the garden. The squire listened at the door, but heard no cheerful ticking of domestic clock. He peered through the clouded window-panes, but there was no warm gleam of home-keeping fire in the rusted grate. There was very little furniture, and that of a wretched sort. As Mr. Denys came out and shut the gate, he muttered that the place did not look like itself —it was going to wrack and ruin as fast as it could go.

"It might be haunted," said Marie-Irene. "I should think the spring could never have the heart to come here any more."

Mr. Denys smiled in his grim fashion, and replied: "I never knew the spring lose its way yet, my little Marie. When you return at Easter, spring will travel with you."

"They are not *all* dead, papa—but where

are the others? Phœbe will not tell me—she only cries, or gets angry."

"Richard is with his sheep, no doubt. The old grandmother is drowsing by the fireside, perhaps."

"By whose fireside, papa? She was always busy in the day-time. I cannot understand it. Do you know whose fault it was that she was sent away? Old Crump is sorry—was he to blame?"

"No; Old Crump was not to blame. No one is to blame unless it be I."

"You, papa?" Marie-Irene looked up, awed, amazed, and never word more spake she of the Orchard or of the people who had been cast out thence, a prey to poverty and death. It was her first acquaintance with the mystery of evil in the world.

In February, when the Manor House was

restored to its normal stillness, when the young married people had gone to their home in London, and Marie-Irene had returned to her convent school, Mr. Denys began to grow very restless, and Delia proposed a change.

"Let us go over the ground again where we travelled the spring after we were married, Hugh, and end in Rome. We were very happy that Easter in Rome; and George will be glad to see us," she said.

Mr. Denys consented. Then came the question what to do with Hugh Oliver. "You are afraid to leave him, Delia?" her husband suggested, noticing that her cheek whitened at the thought of it.

But she denied the fear. "Oh, no, Hugh. I can trust him to Mrs. Brice. We are all in God's hands," was her answer. "Cousin Elizabeth Paul will write as often as we wish.

Or he might even go to her house—it is bright and dry up there, sunny and pure air like the Orchard."

But a medium course was discovered, a better course. Hugh Oliver was committed to the charge of a young widow lady who had lost her husband in India, and had come to settle at Cote—Mrs Consett. She had little boys of her own, and little girls also—plenty of company for Mr. Denys' only son, and good company; for they were a vigorous and healthy flock. Hugh Oliver was extremely happy amongst them. His mother heard of him there as quite contented, and her absence was not very long. The journey to Italy began and ended prosperously, and the travellers were at home again early in May, both visibly improved in spirits by it, and Mr. Denys to all appearance quite himself once more, both in health and humour.

On the Saturday after their return to the Manor House, Mrs. Denys got a message by Phœbe from the place to which her grandmother had been removed, to the effect that the poor old woman was restored so far as her mind was concerned, but reduced to such a condition of weakness that there was reason to apprehend danger to her life. The purport of the message was to ask whether Mrs. Denys would wish to see her. Mrs. Denys did wish it, and the following afternoon caused herself to be driven four miles to the union house, Phœbe having suggested that on Sunday all would be quiet there, and in its best order.

Mrs. Denys shuddered as she entered this doleful refuge of the destitute. Mrs. Blythe was in the infirmary, and thither the matron conducted the lady by stone passages and stone stairs that felt chill and dank, though

the air was like summer out of doors. There were several inmates of the sick ward, some in bed, and some sitting on benches against the white-washed wall. Mrs. Blythe was amongst the latter. Mrs. Denys did not recognise her until she was pointed out—her erect figure was so shrunken and bent, and her visage, once a picture of cheerful, hale old age, so wrinkled, wasted, and sad.

"Do you know me?" asked the visitor, taking one of the limp, feeble hands that lay folded over the other in her lap.

"Yes—it's Mrs. Denys," the poor soul answered, gazing at her while her dim eyes filled with water, and every muscle of her face quivered. The matron bade her not fret when the kind lady was come to see her.

"You are much better," Mrs. Denys said, speaking in a mild, authoritative voice as

one speaks to a fractious, sick child. "Would you like me to take you out of this place? I will, if you like?"

"No, thank you; I'll bide where I am till Richard comes. He's coming soon. It might be to-morrow."

Mrs. Denys looked round the faint, bare ward inhabited by blue-striped cotton shapes of women. The Widow Blythe was a blue-striped cotton shape like all the rest. It was very difficult for her to talk, but there was the natural desire to be polite to her visitor, and the matron urged her to say something. She contemplated Mrs. Denys' black dress reflectively for some time, and then inquired if she had lost anybody.

"I have lost one of my boys, the younger of the two. You remember Master Wilfred?" was the gentle answer.

"Phœbe did not say." There was another

pause for thought, and then in a weak, carefully steadied voice, the old woman proceeded to make conversation. "You would pass the Orchard, ma'am how was the fruit-trees looking this beautiful afternoon?"

"I scarcely noticed them, Mrs. Blythe. I was thinking of other things. But there was a splendid show of bloom a week ago. We saw it as we drove down the hill to the Manor House on arriving."

"Ay, so there was here a splendid show o' bloom, but on Thursday night there came a frost, and in the morning it was like as if the ground was covered with snow. They won't have a good year for cherries, nor yet for plums. They may save a fair lot of apples. Phœbe told me Leesons have the Orchard now. I hope they'll keep a watch on the stripy, black caterpillar—but I don't expect it. Putting Tom Leeson into a garden

was about as wise-like as setting a tailor to plough. It will tell a tale if he leaves it to itself, as he leaves most things."

"Explain to me what the caterpillar does, and I will speak to Tom Leeson myself about it."

"It comes in a sort o' web, thin as smoke, and full o' black dots no bigger than a pin's point. If they're not removed they'll eat the leaves to a skeleton, and the fruit drops afore it's half grown. The apple-trees takes the blight worst, but I've seen it on the plums too. Mary and me used to get a pitcher o' boiling water and the big sithers, and go round the trees in the mornings when the sun was shining—we could sight the webs best i' the sun. If we missed one here and there, and they came to knots o' caterpillars, Mary'd hold the pitcher at arm's length—she was always timid, poor lass. Will you tell

Leesons they must give 'em no quarter—if you would be so good, ma'am?"

"I certainly will," Mrs. Denys promised. The matron encouraged the old woman to talk on, saying that the effort was doing her a benefit already. Mrs. Blythe smiled as if she felt it all very childish, and a condescending to humiliating, sad circumstance.

"There was one other thing I wished to name, but I seem to forget it," she continued, lifting a hand to her head for a moment. Then, with a sudden clearing of her confused memory: "Oh, it's about the orange pippin, a little summer apple, very sweet, that Mr. Clarges is fond of. Leesons might like to know as we sent him the first we gathered, as soon as ever they was fit—a nice basketful. They've got none o' that sort in the parsonage garden."

"I will be sure to tell them. And shall I carry any message to Mr. Clarges? He will be pleased to hear that you think of old times."

Mrs. Blythe's countenance fell, and she did not answer until the matron spoke, repeating the lady's question—had she any message to send to Mr. Clarges? "I don't know that I have any message in particular," she said then. "When Mary was ill, and not likely to live, he came in, and laid half a sovereign down on the table; I pushed it away, and told him I didn't want his charity—and after that they'd to bring me *here*." Her pitiful look and voice were as if she would have asked, could pride have a greater fall? She stopped a minute, collecting her strength, and then continued: "There's a deal o' things perplexing besides the blight. Mr. Clarges says, when we have a wrong that beats us we

must submit, and leave it in higher hands. That made my Richard laugh. It's easy leaving it in higher hands, he says. 'Fear God, and take your own part'—that's his maxim."

"And a very sound maxim too, Mrs. Blythe."

The widow was silent, turning her eyes away to the blank wall. Mrs. Denys was silent also. The scene was truly painful.

"And you expect Richard, perhaps to-morrow, Mrs. Blythe?" the lady said, preparatory to taking her leave.

"Yes, perhaps to-morrow—or if not to-morrow, then the first day he can be spared. I can be no help much to him now, poor fellow, but he's promised he'll take care of me." Her mouth worked, she could say no more.

"You are still weak, but don't fret," Mrs.

Denys whispered. "You will get stronger, and when you come home——"

That word stirred the poor widow's heart, and brought a faint colour to her face: "*Home* —I shall never have a *home* any more in this world—it will be just a place to stop at. It has been like a bad dream, all this last year. First the notice to quit, then hoping against hope, and anger, and hard words. And then the going! And after that the sickness—the bitter trouble that routed my poor wits. But it's over, and I feel like resting now. I am come to my right mind again, and desire to thank God, and say, that I am friends with everybody."

Mrs. Blythe stood up, and gave her hand to Mrs. Denys for good-bye. Mrs. Denys was profoundly moved by this last scene of a laborious life. "Be kind to her," was all she could articulate, offering money to the

matron as she conducted her back to the gate.

The Widow Blythe's need of kindness was but for a little while. When Richard came he was advised to let her remain where she was. She herself had no wish to move: the last change of all was drawing near.

"I should ha' liked to be buried at Cote where your grandfather's buried and the rest of us, but don't be at no trouble for me if the clergyman won't have it—I'm out o' the parish," she said once. And another time: "I never bore malice, Richard, and don't you. But for their sake that ha' been the sacrifice, and for the sake o' other folk that may be as we were, try to get things set right between rich and poor about the land; for there's a wrong surely, though they want to persuade us it's no man's fault. I don't hold with Mr. Clarges that what's difficult is to be left to

miracle. I'd have men strive for what's just, ay, and suffer for it, if need be—else why did Christ die? It's poor logic that nothing's worth fighting for. My love to Jack, and tell him what I say."

Richard answered that it was the parson's easy, pleasant fashion: "Not that I wish to taste his mercy," he added with a shrewd perception that Mr. Clarges might possibly prove hard enough where his own skin was touched or his own treasures were liable to depredation.

Mrs. Blythe had her heart's desire, and was buried with her own people. Richard had sought a shepherd's place elsewhere, and was giving Cote up. Mr. Clarges expressed a wish to see him after the funeral, for the purpose of saying a few salutary words, and the young man, who had a habit of affection for the little parson like most of his neighbours, obeyed his invitation. Presenting himself at the back

door of the rectory, he was conducted to the study. Mr. Clarges took his toil-hardened hand, and asked him to sit down; then sat down himself, and shaded his eyes.

"This ought to be a memorable day with you, Blythe," he began in his murmurous voice. "You are being early taught what sorrow is. May it draw you nearer to God." Richard turned his hat round and round with its crape weeper, and stared at the old Persian hearth-rug under his feet. Mr. Clarges droned pathetically on: "You are going into a distant part of the country, I hear, and this may be my last opportunity—I pray you not to let this world with its idle amusements, nor yet with its distractions and cares, cause you to forget that better world where we hope all to meet—God in His mercy grant."

Richard lifted up his face, and in a sweet, sonorous voice replied: "Sir, not to be disre-

spectful—I am not thinking yet of any other world but this, and to do my duty in it. Death and judgment I've need to bear in mind. Bad thoughts will rise, and it's hard forgiving."

The clergyman winced perceptibly, but neither spoke nor uncovered his eyes, though his sense of hearing was quickened.

Richard went on: "I got my bit o' schooling like other lads, and my way looked plain before me—day's work, and day's wage, and the sleep of a labouring man, that's sound though his victual be none too much—and I married my Mary. But there, you know the story, sir. It was not losing the Orchard broke us; it was having no Christian place to go into when we had to quit. Master didn't want to give me my discharge, and truth to tell, I didn't ask it. It seemed like tearing us up by the roots, turning us out o' the Orchard, but to

bid us go clean away from Cote was more than I could stomach. I'd been upo' the farm from a little chap—why, I went wi' father and the horses when I was seven, and could guide the team and crack my whip like a man, sir. But Mr. Denys wanted us off the land, that was what it was. We'd offended him, grandmother and me. We'd come to be in his way. We'd dared to speak up against his high-handed doings, and he didn't like it. In the sight o' such as the squire, poor folks have got no natural rights at all."

Mr. Clarges returned from the spiritual world to mundane matters very reluctantly: "It is the same all the world over, Blythe. The squire does what he likes with his own. You have no wrong that many others have not complained of before you. The small holdings are being everywhere thrown in with the great farms, and the labouring people are crowding

into the big towns where there are potteries, iron-works, and the like. It is what we call progress."

"Then progress means more haste than good speed, sir. There'd better be ten holdings for one, like the Orchard, than fewer—more evening of things, sir—more equality."

"*Equality*—I am sorry to hear that word from you, Blythe. You are giving way to unreasonable and mischievous opinions."

"No, sir, my opinions is neither mischievous nor unreasonable—they're the fruit of what I've suffered," Richard rejoined. "You used to call grandmother worldly—she didn't well know what you meant, but she guessed as it were not intended for a compliment. Are *you* worldly, sir? I speak as man to man now—that windy counsel about ordering myself lowly and reverently to all my betters

has blown by me since we've heard how you could take the squire's part when hard and cruel he was, and nobody else in all Cote daring to make his excuses."

Mr. Clarges assumed a grave and stern aspect. "Blythe," he said, "you are on the high road to become a demagogue. You had better mind what you are about."

"I know what I am about, sir, and I know what I say. Mr. Denys did what the law lets him do, and on his principle he did no wrong. But you, *you* disobeyed your orders. You did not set a wholesome example and pattern to your flock: you did not set forward quietness, love, and peace amongst your people. Nothing of the sort, sir. 'Be still, be patient,' that was all your song to us—what you said to the squire, that's betwixt him and you—but you said nothing to any profit."

There was a red stain on the clergyman's

cheek, but he answered with a mild, melancholy sneer: "I spoke and acted for the best, Blythe. We have all an exalted sense of other men's duties. You know Mr. Denys as well as I do, and that he is not easily moved from the thing he has determined on. You have decided prudently to leave the place; your rancour would continue and increase in view of what you have lost, and might become a danger both to yourself and others."

"God knows, sir, I wish the squire no harm," Richard said with intensity, and got up to go. The rector shook hands, but his countenance was not friendly. His feelings were very much chafed and frayed indeed. Rebuke was extremely painful to him.

That evening Mrs. Clarges found her husband tired, and greatly out of spirits; she could not succeed in cheering him. "You

have had hard work lately, Henry, such hard, distressing work. All this sickness in the village this winter has been bad for you, quite too much for you. You need a rest," she said. "And the funeral to-day was terribly trying."

Miss Nancy drooped despondently by. Her heart had bled for her poor neighbours who were gone, she had vehemently espoused their cause, she had put on mourning, and attended the Widow Blythe's funeral. Now it was over, like Mrs. Denys, she turned to her own again and made the best of him. "Yes, dear Henry, you have been tried, we know," she said. "Take a holiday, and go abroad. It will strengthen and refresh you. When you come home again these sad events will have passed out of remembrance, and it will be easier to make a new start."

Dear Henry answered his sister testily. He

did not like her intimation that a new start was desirable, but he did like her advice, and he took it. And for the next twelve months a stranger occupied his pulpit at home.

END OF VOL. II.

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